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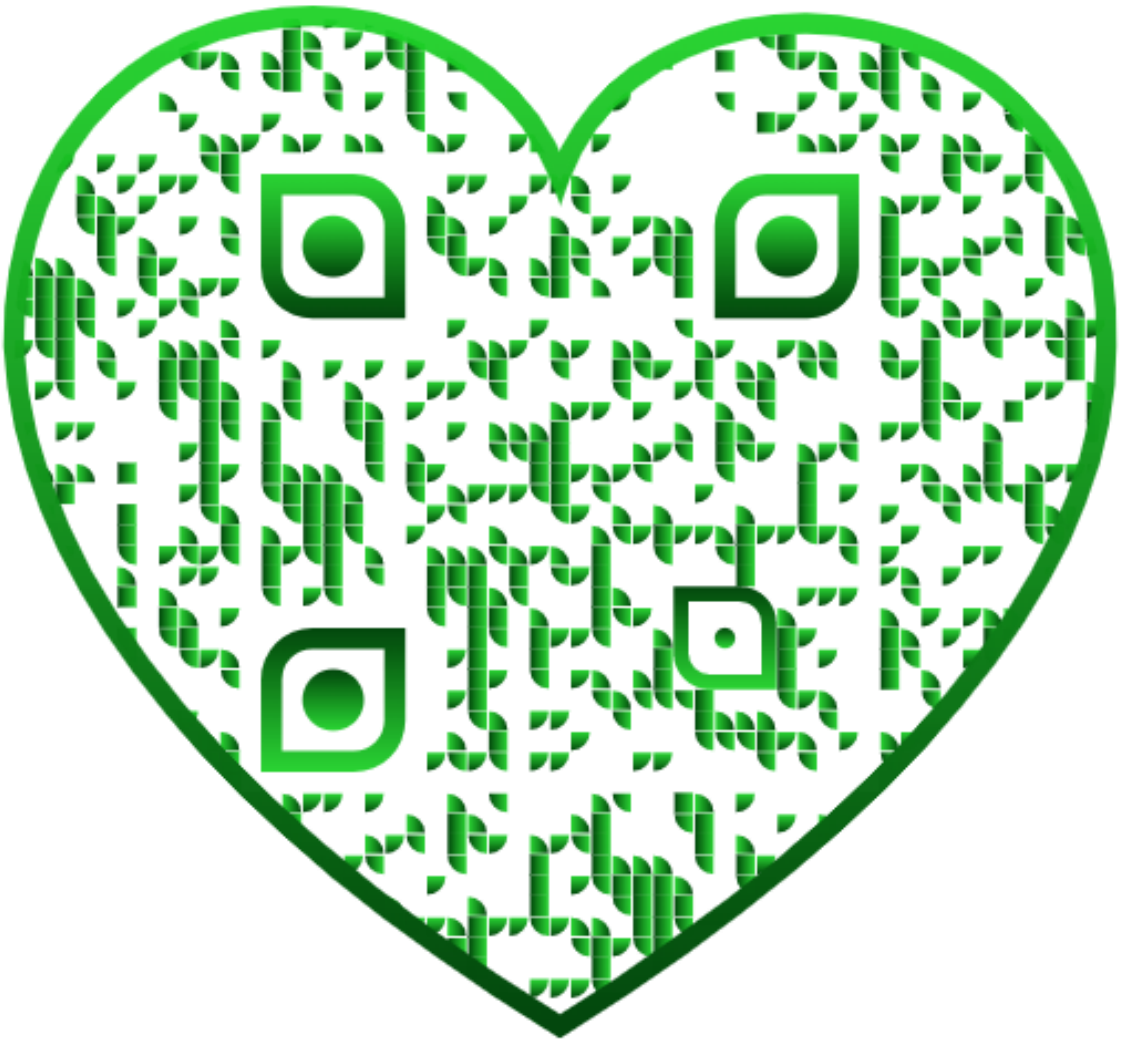

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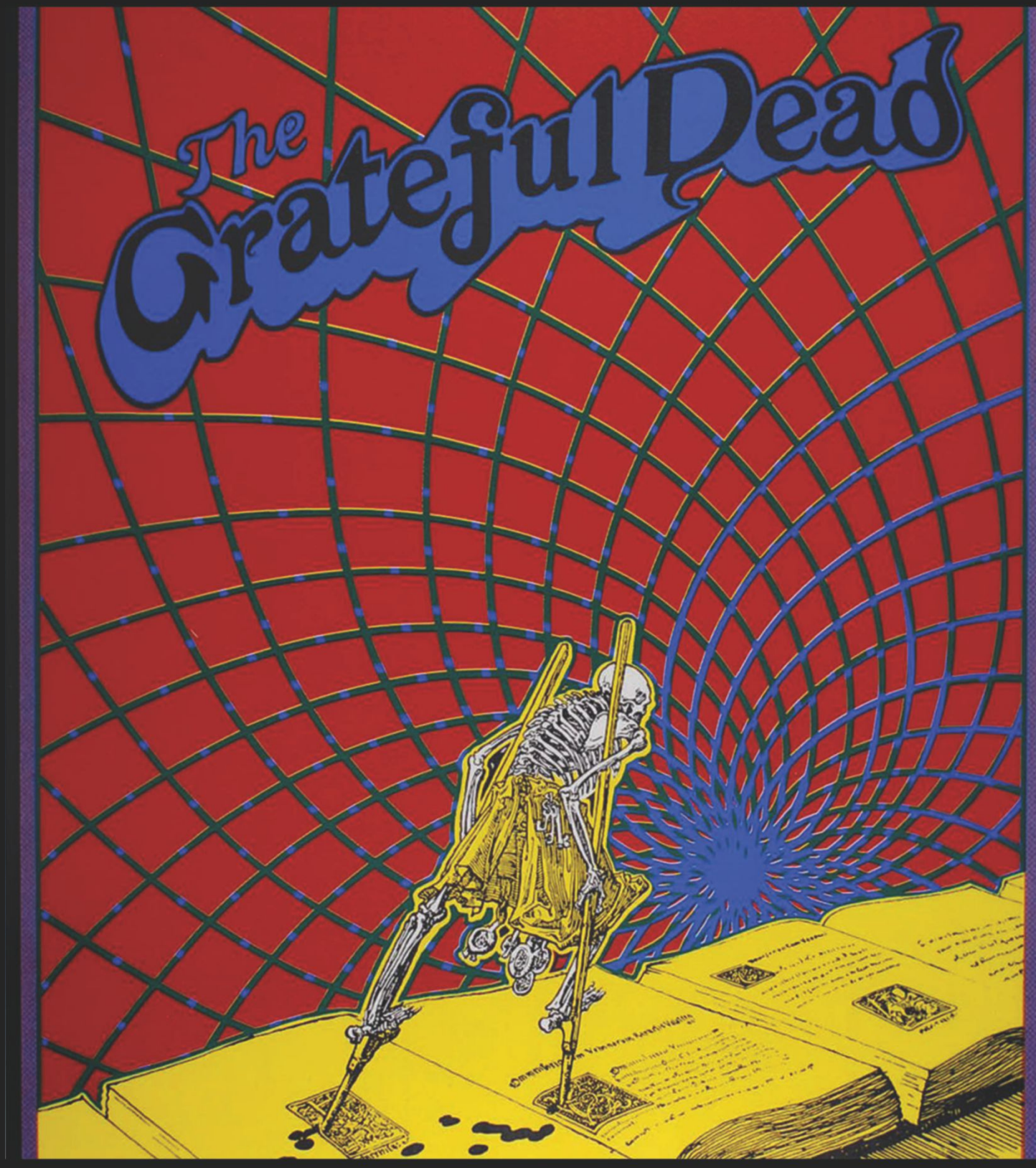

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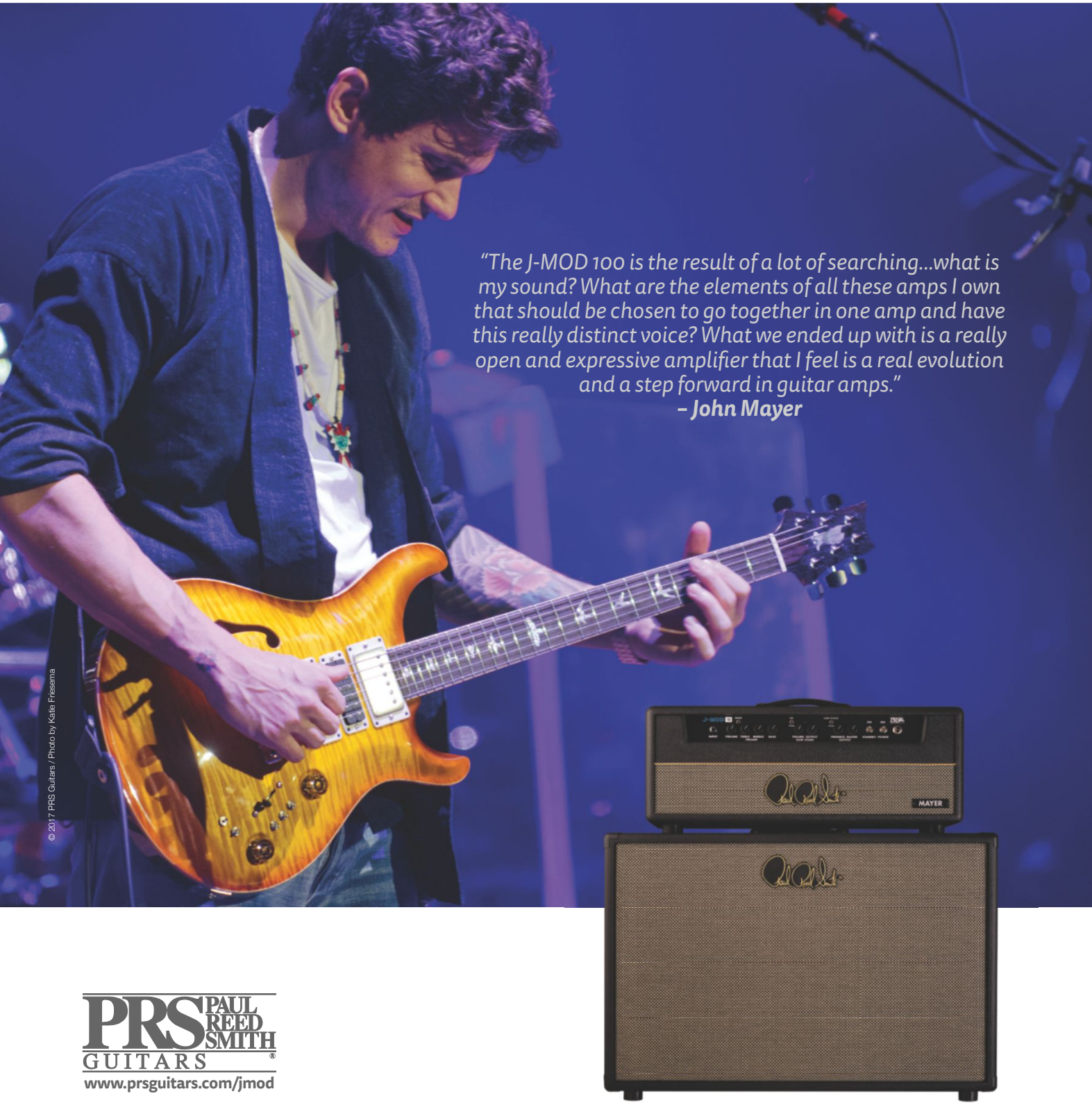

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V44 NO3

MILESTONES COME and go, but since we're in the Grateful Dead frame of mind this month, there's one I wish to call to your attention.

Actually, there's plenty happening in Dead World from the third go-round of Dead & Company and the official release of the *Long Strange Trip* documentary (both of which we cover in this issue) through the return of the Betty Boards to the vaults (more on that in our next issue).

But something that I want to call to your attention is an album anniversary. No, not the 50th of the eponymous Grateful Dead release. (But be sure to check out the newly remastered version, which comes with bonus live audio from July 29 and 30, 1966.) Instead, I wish to hail the 25th anniversary of the *Planet Drum* album.

Yes, technically, the silver anniversary took place this past fall but, like any good celebration, there's no reason the good times can't keep on coming.

On *Planet Drum*, Mickey Hart drew together an ensemble of the world's greatest percussionists: Zakir Hussain and T.H. "Vikku" Vinayakram (from India), Sikiru Adepoju and Babatunde Olatunji (Nigeria), Airto Moreira (Brazil, along with vocalist Flora Purim), and Giovanni Hidalgo and Frank Colón (Puerto Rico).

Not only did *Planet Drum* win the Grammy Award for Best World Music Album in the first year that award was given, but it also topped the Billboard World Music Album charts (and remained there for 26 weeks!) at a time when people really started to engage the sounds of the globe in a whole new way.

To that end, I asked Mickey Hart to reflect on his intentions and the record's legacy:

These were the best—the crème de la crème of rhythmists all in one room—just playing with no agenda. That was how I wanted it, and it worked out perfectly. Almost everything was a first take! We didn't even have to say "Take 2" or anything—we just played. It was magic; that was the thing I think people hear in Planet Drum.

It was just so smooth, so magical, so giving, and it was percussion. Not like it used to be, like percussion "bash bash bang bang boom boom." This was romancing of the drum. I saw it as a soft side, which holds so much emotion, as opposed to the way we normally play drums, like in a rock-and-roll setting where we really play them hard—most of the time too hard! So this was a bunch of skilled professionals coming together from different genres, and I think that's the reason that it resonated so much, because it was a metaphor about how people can come together and play.

A lot of people say that this was the catalyst for the women and children who are now drumming, the community RhythmFests and the drum groups that have formed. Remember, before this, everyone was playing a drum set, and that wasn't the real main feature of Planet Drum. *It was mostly the world's drumming: drums from around the world, and the sounds they make and how they mix.*

One of the big things was telling the kids that it was OK not to play a drum set. That's an American instrument. Our invention the American drum set—"the traps," they call them—is one of our best, our truest. But still, we've heard so much of all that, I thought that this would be a time to turn to our love of hand drums. And then of course, Remo and all of the manufacturers started making djembes, so the djembes almost became like the guitar of the '80s or the '90s.

Music is a universal rhythm, for sure. It showed a lot of that. It said, "You can do this, too, and it belongs in any kind of music you want it to belong in." So, it was a very magical, powerful rhythmic statement

Hear! Hear!

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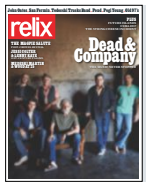

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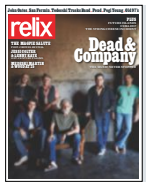

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CONTENTS
APRIL_MAY 2017

DEPARTMENTS

8 **Dear Relix**
Letters, comments and more

10 **The Beat**
Dave Matthews & Tim Reynolds in Riviera Maya

11 **Festival Guide: Set II**
The second installment in our signature survey of this year's best fests

12 **Soundcheck**
Live reviews and news from around the globe

17 **Global Beat**
Orchestra Baobab

18 **My Page**
Rhett Miller spins fictional tales through personal reflections

19 **Swing Time 19**
Gregory Porter

20 **Tour Diary**
Pond

22 **On The Verge**
5 artists you should know about

24 **At Work**
Peter Silberman, Laura Marling

25 **Spotlight**
Pegi Young, San Fermin

28 **The Core**
Derek Trucks

29 **Track by Track**
The String Cheese Incident's *Believe*

31 **Behind The Scene**
Tour manager and entrepreneur Trey Allen

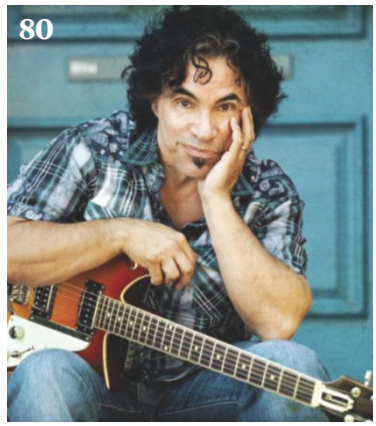
32 **Soapbox**
Musicians rally in support of the ACA

33 **Deadicated**
Amir Bar-Lev's film *Long Strange Trip*

34 **Interview**
Spiral Stairs

58 **Reviews**
New album releases, plundering the vaults and more

80 **Parting Shots**
John Oates



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FEATURES

52 | The Music Never Stopped

In February 2015, **John Mayer** invited **Bob Weir** to join him during his guest stint as host of *The Late Late Show*. What began as a brief soundcheck ended two hours later as a new opportunity. So, following their reunion at the 2015 Fare Thee Well shows, Weir, **Mickey Hart** and **Bill Kreutzmann** decided to move forward with a new project. **Dead & Company**, which debuted that October with the three Grateful Dead members joined by Mayer, **Oteil Burbridge** and **Jeff Chimenti**, soon built its own momentum through rousing takes on the Dead canon. Editor-in-Chief **Dean Budnick** speaks with the Company men to explore the origins, development and future of the group, which will return to amphitheaters and baseball stadiums this summer.

49 | *The Far Field* of Dreams

Future Islands broke out commercially with their polished 2014 LP, *Singles*, aided by a viral-friendly performance on *The Late Show*. Yet, after an expansive, 22-month tour filled with bigger venues and more diverse audiences, the Baltimore synth-pop trio faced a difficult task: hurdling their own high bar. **Ryan Reed** caught up with dynamic frontman **Samuel Herring** around the release of their fifth album, *The Far Field*, and explains how a recent bout of writer's block helped inject a welcome sense of "messiness" into Future Islands' festival-ready sound.

46 | A Collective of Souls

For many longtime fans, The Black Crowes' definitive '90s lineup was driven by the interlocking guitars of **Rich Robinson** and **Marc Ford**. Though it might have taken a superstorm to truly bring them back together, the once-and-future bandmates have decided to forge ahead without longtime Crowes frontman Chris Robinson as **The Magpie Salute**. **Brian Robbins** presents a behind-the-scenes peek at Rich and Ford's unexpected reunion, as well as their decision to soldier on in the wake of longtime keyboardist Eddie Harsch's tragic passing.

42 | Cuba 2017: Tales of a Musack Missionary

Cuba is complicated and beautiful—a time warp, a hallucination of a place that feels like you're walking through a surrealist painting. For most U.S. travelers, it's also remained a somewhat mystical, closed-off relic of the Cold War for more than a generation. But now that the country has finally opened its doors, Cuba has quickly grown into a top destination for tourists and touring musicians alike. Award-winning television writer **Donick Cary** offers a survey of the live-music world's newest musical mecca.

39 | Psalms of Our Own 39

In 1995, while in Nashville, East Village icon and longtime Patti Smith guitarist **Lenny Kaye** overheard outlaw-country legend **Jessi Colter** playing Psalms alone on her piano. Kaye was awestruck by her interpretation of King David's Biblical poems and, as he tells Editor-in-Chief **Mike Greenhaus**, reached out about formally capturing her spiritual meditations. Now, years later, the unlikely collaborators have finally released *The Psalms*—a decades-in-the-making LP that brings a set of sacred, ancient poems into a secular, modern world.

36 | The Triple Entente

Twenty-five years—that's a long time for any band, especially one that's remained as forward thinking and adventurous as **Medeski Martin & Wood**. Although they've weathered a few unexpected twists and turns—and a recent pause—**John Medeski**, **Chris Wood** and **Billy Martin** have figured out how to stick together while still growing in different directions. Contributor **Mike Ayers** retraces the ensemble's steps from their first performances at the Village Gate more than 25 years ago—and explains how this unlikely trio became the Downtown New York jazz scene's leading ambassadors to the jamband world.

Bill Kelly (Dead & Company)

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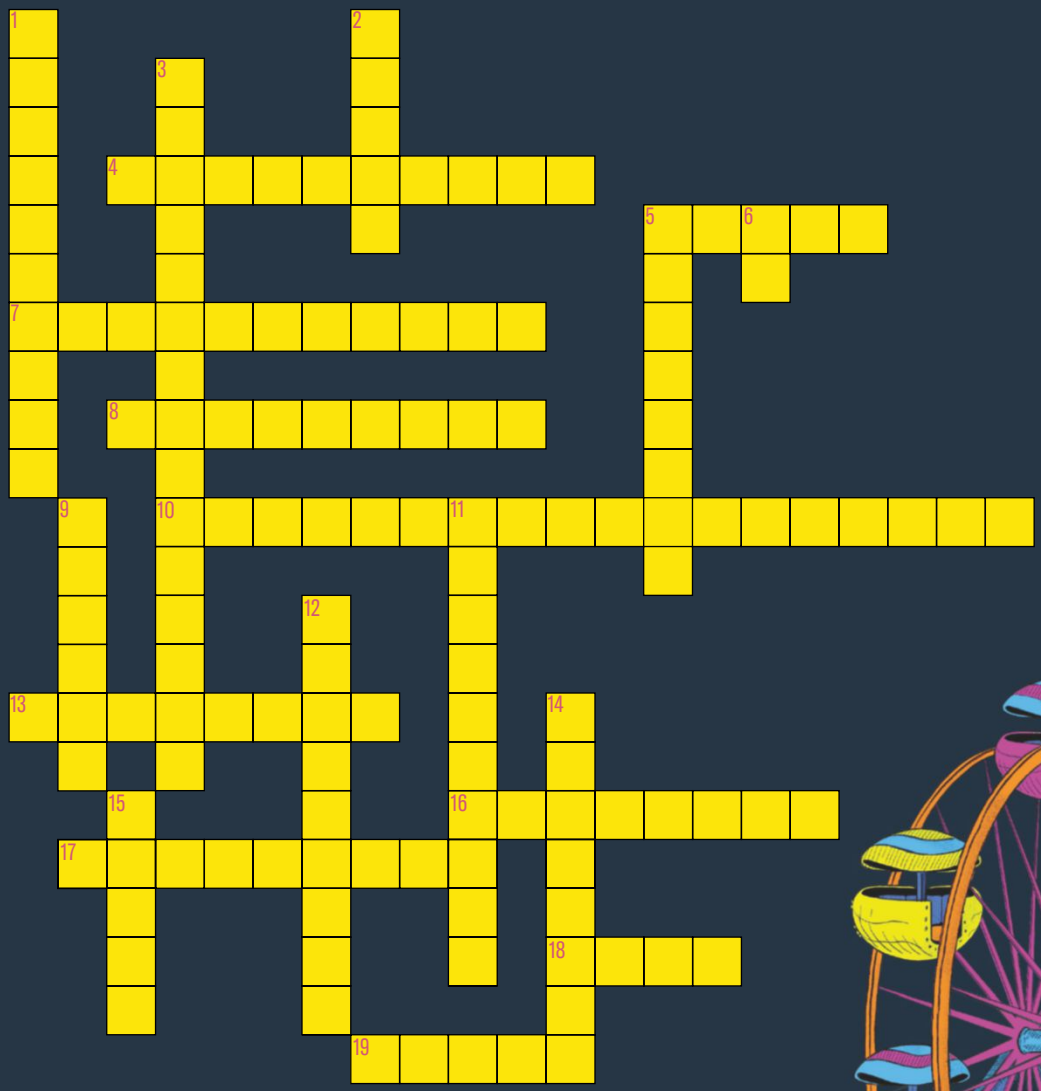

ACROSS: 4. Henrí's his name. Pork's his game. 5. A deep narrow channel with a stream running through it. Also artist name playing Bonnaroo '17. 7. It's not dead. Just a quiet dance. 8. Everybody's working for the... 10. Give it away. Give it away now. 13. A Bonnaroovian yearly collaboration. 16. What tent. 17. Main Stage name. 18. Bonnaroo community centers. 19. An artist with a green light

DOWN: 1. City in Tennessee. Not the UK. 2. Way down we go 3. The Mayor from 79th. 5. The cool off spot 6. Joshua Tree. 9. Name of the Bonnaroo mascot. 11. You are a... (SKRILLEX remix). 12. Centeroo area with global mindset. 14. More than just pizza. 15. Penned "I see you." Not XXX rated.

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DEAR RELIX

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"THE BAKER'S DOZEN" STIRS THE POT

In late January, Phish confirmed a record-breaking 13-night run at New York's Madison Square Garden. The group had actually toyed with the idea for "The Baker's Dozen" long before they temporarily split in 2004; keyboardist Page McConnell even discussed the concept in a 2007 *Relix* cover story. Though many fans were excited by the band's innovative MSG residency—as well as the free show included by buying the entire package—others complained about the lack of a proper outdoor summer tour.

I've been pondering this move by the world's best band for a day now, and I've come to this stark realization: I've always trusted this band's creativity and respected their integrity. Why should I not do the same now? The vast majority of the time, they blow my expectations out of the water. Other times, they leave me scratching my head wondering what they're thinking. In order to avoid the repetition and monotony of playing 13 (almost) consecutive shows at the same venue, they're going to have to get really creative.

Chaz Willmann via Facebook

I just don't think it works to compare Phish right now to the Dead in 1991. One could argue that the Dead were rarely as inspired after that year ended. Phish, by contrast, seem to be seriously pumped to still be a working, thriving and inspired band. *Frank Hanwell via Facebook*

Super frustrating, as New York City is the last place you'd want to spend the summer—super costly and just not a fun venue. Grateful for dates, but hate the Big Apple. *Kara Collins via Facebook*

Phish

This is going to either be the best thing for Phish in years, or a huge bomb. I can't wait to see what they play.

Kris Harvey via Facebook

Last time a band did a residency over my birthday, I went to six of them at The Fillmore. Might need to look into this. *Sven Moravec via Facebook*

If you're going to break Billy Joel's record, then Phish must cover a Billy Joel song one of those nights.

David Daskal via Facebook

They've earned the right to play whenever and wherever they like.

Peter Naughton via Facebook

Ever since the renovation, Madison Square Garden has lost its soul, and the sound has suffered as well. Happy for people that are stoked, but I personally don't like it, especially in summer, which is such a special time to see them in gorgeous outdoor venues.

Evan Wolfe via Facebook

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In Your Ear! has provided the dorm-room soundtracks for Harvard, Boston University and other Beantown colleges since 1982. The store still offers crate-diggers a wide range of mediums, from 8-tracks to classic vinyl. In Your Ear! has also presented many memorable in-store performances over the years, and proudly boasts about one of its most well-known customers: Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page.

FANS.COM PHOTO CONTEST

Thievery Corporation performing at New York's Terminal 5 on Dec. 9, 2016. Photo by Rob Myers.

Want to be published in *Relix*? Just upload an original photo from a live music event to Relix.com's Fans.com Photo Contest app. Noted photographer Jay Blakesberg will select the winner from the group of 10 finalists who receive the most votes.

INSTAPRINT

While on a promotional tour in support of his latest album, *Prisoner*, March *Relix* cover subject Ryan Adams (@misterryanadams) bumped into Thurston Moore in Los Angeles. "My first pick for neighborhood basketball noise rock team," Adams wrote about the much taller Sonic Youth guitarist on his Instagram in late February.

WELCOME TO JAMROCK REGGAE CRUISE 2017

WELCOME TO JAMROCK REGGAE CRUISE returns this November 13-18, 2017 aboard Royal Caribbean's "Independence of The Seas" making stops in Montego Bay and Ocho Rios Jamaica for its 4th annual one-of-a-kind Reggae experience. This year's line up includes Damian "Jr. Gong" Marley, Stephen "Ragga" Marley, Sizzla, Jah Cure, Luciano, The Big Ship (ft. Freddie McGregor, Stephen "Di Genius" McGregor and Chino McGregor), Bounty Killer, Tarrus Riley, Cocoa Tea, Busy Signal, Popcaan, Inner Circle, Richie Spice, Tanto Metro & Devonte, Pressure, Spice, Raging Fyah and Iba Mahr. Sound Systems and DJ's include Stone Love, Renaissance, King Jammy's, Mighty Crown, Tony Matterhorn, Kingston 12 Hi-Fi and more to be announced.

"...A five-night pilgrimage from Miami to Jamaica, coordinated by Damian "Jr. Gong" Marley and featuring pretty much every big name in contemporary Jamaican music, from dancehall to dub, singer to sound system." - National Public Radio

WTJRC has become one of the most exciting and talked about Reggae gatherings in the world. For music lovers, it is notably the only place to see some of the top reggae artists who are not able to travel and perform in the US. Last year's cruise had fans from over 40 nations all over the globe converging for their love of Reggae music and culture.

"...Welcome to Jamrock Reggae Cruise ...featuring five nights of performances by the biggest names in Jamaican music and helmed by one of today's most exhilarating artists, Damian "Jr. Gong" Marley..." – Forbes.com

"A rare opportunity for fans outside of Jamaica to catch their favorite artists." - MTV.com

To book a cabin for 2018, please visit www.welcometojamrockreggaecruise.com

THE BEAT

THE BEST FROM FESTS & TOURS TODAY

DAVE MATTHEWS AND TIM REYNOLDS

BARCELÓ MAYA BEACH RIVIERA MAYA, MEXICO FEBRUARY 23-25, 2017

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RENÉ HUEMER

Dave Matthews and **Tim Reynolds** will spend much of the spring and early summer touring together through Europe and the United States as a duo. Over three nights from February 23-25 at Barceló Maya Beach in Riviera Maya, Mexico, they offered a taste of what is to come. The pair performed just yards from the Caribbean Sea, on a bill that also included South African legend **Vusi Mahlasela**, as well as renowned Cuban artists **Carlos Varela** and **Aldo López-Gavilán**.

The first night kicked off with *Some Devil*'s "So Damn Lucky" and featured familiar songs such as "Satellite," "Crush" and "Lie in Our Graves." The two also showcased newer selections from the Dave Matthews Band repertoire, including "Virginia in the Rain," "Samurai Cop" and "Bismarck." In addition, they rewarded the faithful with "Eh Hee," which they had not played together since November 2011, and the brief, improvised tune, "Pretty Bird."

While the pair worked in live staples like "Don't Drink the Water," "Crash Into Me" and "Warehouse" during their second performance the following night, Dave and Tim presented rarities such as "Dodo" and their first duo renditions of "Fool to Think" and "The Best of What's Around" since early 2003. Matthews and Reynolds also played the traditional "Worried Man Blues" for the first time, as well as a fitting "Dancing Nancies."

After two nights by themselves, they welcomed Mahlasela to the stage for a couple of tunes on February 25. Mahlasela appeared on "Mother of Africa," a song he recorded with Matthews for the 2016 documentary *Naledi: A Baby Elephant's Tale*, and he remained for "Everyday." Other highlights included an unexpected opening take on "Little Thing," the pair's premiere version of *Stand Up*'s "You Might Die Trying" and their first "The Song That Jane Likes" since 1999. They eventually closed out the event with a double encore, starting with Matthews' solo version of "Rye Whiskey" and the duo's reading of "All Along the Watchtower." Matthews and Reynolds then stepped offstage before retuning for "So Much to Say," followed by their first performance of the sing-along "Stay (Wasting Time)" since 1999, bringing the destination event to a fitting close.

THE 2017 RELIX FESTIVAL GUIDE: SET II

COMPILED BY ROB SLATER

Festival season was once strictly a summer rite of passage but, these days, some of the year's best offerings occur a full season earlier. From an Allman Brothers family campout in a Florida forest to city happenings in Hotlanta, from parties on the beach to parties in the Big Easy and from bluegrass summits to jamband gatherings, there's something for everyone before school's out of session. We'll continue to preview the best of this year's fests and destination events throughout our 2017 issues and online at www.relix.com/festivals.

Lineups are up-to-date as of press time. If you see an (R) next to a listing, then be sure to visit us at the Relix booth onsite.

(R) Wanee Festival
4/20-22 // Live Oak, FL
Bob Weir & The Campfire Band, Widespread Panic, Trey Anastasio Band, Gov't Mule, Dark Star Orchestra, Dr. John & The Nite Trippers, JJ Grey & Mofro, Les Brers, Blackberry Smoke, more
waneefestival.com

Old Settler's Music Festival
4/20-23 // Driftwood, TX
Shakey Graves, The Del McCoury Band, Los Lobos, Sam Bush, Leftover Salmon, Sarah Jarosz, Gregory Alan Isakov, Old 97's, Elephant Revival, more
oldsettlersmusicfest.org

Las Rageous
4/21-22 // Las Vegas, NV
Godsmack, Coheed and Cambria, Anthrax, Killswitch Engage, Avenged Sevenfold, Breaking Benjamin, Mastodon, Eagles of Death Metal, All That Remains, more
lasrageous.com

(R) SweetWater 420 Fest
4/21-23 // Atlanta, GA
Widespread Panic, Trey Anastasio Band, Ween, Slightly Stoopid, moe., Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue, Dark Star Orchestra, Lettuce, Anders Osborne, more
sweetwater420fest.com

(R) High Water Fest
4/22-23 // North Charleston, SC
The Avett Brothers, The Shins, Shovels & Rope, Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats, Dawes, Lucius, Margo Price, Charles Bradley & His Extraordinaires, Deer Tick, more
highwaterfest.com

Something Wonderful
4/22-23 // Fort Worth, TX
Porter Robinson, DJ Snake, Flux Pavilion, Tchami, 3LAU, Slushii, Ookay, Juaz, Don Diablo, San Holo, more
somethingwonderful.com

Norman Music Festival
4/27-29 // Norman, OK
Thee Oh Sees, Israel Nash, Oddisee & Good Company, White Reaper, Sweet Spirit, Low Cut Connie, Cat Clyde, GGOOLLDD, more
normanmusicfestival.com

MerleFest
4/27-30 // Wilkesboro, NC
Zac Brown Band, The Avett Brothers, Béla Fleck, Marty Stuart & His Fabulous Superlatives, The Del McCoury Band, Leftover Salmon, Sam Bush Band, Jerry Douglas, Peter Rowan, Steep Canyon Rangers, more
merlefest.org

Stagecoach
4/28-30 // Indio, CA
Dierks Bentley, Shania Twain, Kenny Chesney, Willie Nelson & Family, Jerry Lee Lewis, Los Lobos, Maren Morris, The Zombies, Rhiannon Giddens, more
stagecoachfestival.com

New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival
4/28 & 5/7 // New Orleans, LA
Stevie Wonder, Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers, Dave Matthews and Tim Reynolds, Trey Anastasio Band, Widespread Panic, Kings of Leon, Usher & The Roots, Harry Connick Jr., Lorde, Snoop Dogg, Wilco, more
nojazzfest.com

Charm City Bluegrass Festival
4/29 // Baltimore, MD
The Lone Bellow, Cabinet, Cris Jacobs, The Dustbowl Revival, Lonesome River Band, Horseshoes & Hand Grenades, Valerie Smith & Liberty Pike, more
mt.cm/5th-annual-charm-city-bluegrass-festival

Fort Rock
4/29-30 // Fort Myers, FL
Def Leppard, Soundgarden, A Perfect Circle, The Offspring, Mastodon, Chevelle, Papa Roach, The Pretty Reckless, Eagles of Death Metal, more
fortrockfestival.com

Fortress Festival
4/29-30 // Fort Worth, TX
Run the Jewels, Purity Ring, Flying Lotus, Slowdive, Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats, Peter Hook & The Light, Houndmouth, Wolf Parade, Alvvays, more
fortressfestival.com

Welcome to Rockville Festival
4/29-30 // Jacksonville, FL
Soundgarden, Def Leppard, Chevelle, A Perfect Circle, The Offspring, Mastodon, Coheed and Cambria, Three Days Grace, more
welcometorockvillefestival.com

SunFest
5/3-7 // West Palm Beach, FL
Widespread Panic, Blink-182, Weezer, Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, Snoop Dogg, Dirty Heads, Ziggy Marley, Tori Kelly, Steve Winwood, Ben Harper & The Innocent Criminals, St. Paul & The Broken Bones, Wavves, more
sunfest.com

Carolina Rebellion
5/5-7 // Concord, NC
Soundgarden, Def Leppard, Avenged Sevenfold, A Perfect Circle, Korn, The Offspring, Pierce the Veil, Mastodon, The Cult, more
carolinarebellion.com

Middlelands
5/5-7 // Todd Mission, TX
Bassnectar, Major Lazer, Jurassic 5, Big Gigantic, Kaskade, Gramatik, Phantogram, GRiZ, Bonobo, more
middlelands.com

Rolling Loud Festival
5/5-7 // Miami, FL
Kendrick Lamar, Future, Lil Wayne, A$AP Rocky, Travis Scott, Young Thug, Mac Miller, Run the Jewels, Action Bronson, more
rollingloud.com

Shaky Beats Music Festival
5/5-7 // Atlanta, GA
The Chainsmokers, Kaskade, GRiZ, Zeds Dead, RL Grime, Flosstradamus, Girl Talk, Little Dragon, Gramatik, more
shakybeatsfestival.com

FORM Arcosanti
5/12-14 // Arcosanti, AZ
Father John Misty, Solange, Future Islands, James Blake, Skrillex, Deafheaven, Tycho, Hundred Waters, Moses Sumney, more
experienceform.com

Shaky Knees Music Festival
5/12-14 // Atlanta, GA
The xx, LCD Soundsystem, Phoenix, Cage the Elephant, Pixies, The Shins, Ryan Adams, X Ambassadors, Nick Murphy, more
shakykneesfestival.com

Northern Invasion
5/13-14 // Somerset, WI
Soundgarden, Godsmack, Kid Rock, The Offspring, Bush, The Pretty Reckless, Papa Roach, Alter Bridge, Sum 41, more
northerninvasion.com

Domefest
5/18-20 // Bedford, PA
Pigeons Playing Ping Pong, The Main Squeeze, Consider the Source, Aqueous, Electric Love Machine, Broccoli Samurai, Swift Technique, G-Nome Project, Flux Capacitor, more
domefestival.com

Joshua Tree Music Festival
5/18-21 // Joshua Tree, CA
The California Honeydrops, Orgone, Kraak & Smaak, House of Hamsa, Liberation Movement, Dirtwire, Marques Wyatt, Jambinai, DJ Williams & Shots Fired, more
joshuatreemusicfestival.com

Moogfest
5/18-21 // Durham, NC
Dave Harrington, Wolf Eyes, Nick Zinner, Kyle Dixon & Michael Stein, Princess Nokia, The Haxan Cloak, Moor Mother, Laraaji, more
moogfest.com

Orange Blossom Jamboree
5/18-21 // Brooksville, FL
The Heavy Pets, Thomas Wynn & The Believers, The Lee Boys, Come Back Alice, Uncle John's Band, The Legendary JC's, Grass Is Dead, The Applebutter Express, Kaleigh Baker & Her Enablers, more
orangeblossomjamboree.com

Susquehanna Breakdown
5/19-20 // Scranton, PA
Greensky Bluegrass, The Wood Brothers, Keller Williams, Cabinet, Turkuaz, Keller & Cabinet, Tom Hamilton's Breakdown All Stars, Billy Strings, Kitchen Dwellers, Driftwood, more
susquehannabreakdown.com

(R) Hangout Music Festival
5/19-21 // Gulf Shores, AL
Mumford & Sons, Frank Ocean, Twenty One Pilots, Chance the Rapper, Major Lazer, Weezer, DJ Snake, MGMT, Sigur Rós, more
hangoutmusicfest.com

Rock on the Range
5/19-21 // Columbus, OH
Metallica, Soundgarden, Korn, Primus, The Offspring, Volbeat, Bush, Chevelle, Of Mice & Men, more
rockontherange.com

Lightning in a Bottle
5/24-29 // Bradley, CA
Bassnectar, Bonobo, RÜFÜS DU SOL, Kaytranada, Bob Moses, Jhené Aiko, Bomba Estéreo, Thao & The Get Down Stay Down, Big Wild, more
lightninginabottle.org

(R) DelFest
5/25-28 // Cumberland, MD
The Del McCoury Band, The Travelin' McCourys feat. Dierks Bentley, Trey Anastasio Band, Gov't Mule, Béla Fleck & Chris Thile, Railroad Earth, Leftover Salmon, Hot Rize, The Infamous Stringdusters, more
delfest.com

Rooster Walk
5/25-28 // Martinsville, VA
Greensky Bluegrass, The Wailers, Anders Osborne, Anderson East, The Motet, Marcus King Band, Billy Strings, Eric Krasno, Yarn, more
roosterwalk.com

Boston Calling
5/26-28 // Allston, MA
Tool, Mumford & Sons, Chance the Rapper, Bon Iver, The xx, Major Lazer, Weezer, Sigur Rós, Solange, Run the Jewels, more
bostoncalling.com

BottleRock Napa Valley
5/26-28 // Napa, CA
Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers, Foo Fighters, Maroon 5, Ben Harper & The Innocent Criminals, Modest Mouse, The Roots, Silversun Pickups, Band of Horses, Fitz & The Tantrums, more
bottlerocknapavalley.com

California Roots Music & Arts Festival
5/26-28 // Monterey, CA
Rebelution, Nas, Dirty Heads, SOJA, Thievery Corporation, Jurassic 5, Matisyahu, Easy Star All-Stars, John Brown's Body, more
californiarootsfestival.com

Country 500
5/26-28 // Daytona Beach, FL
Miranda Lambert, Blake Shelton, Kid Rock, Keith Urban, Brooks & Dunn, Thomas Rhett, Hank Williams Jr., Kip Moore, Martina McBride, more
country500.com

Dark Star Jubilee
5/26-28 // Thornville, OH
Dark Star Orchestra, Greensky Bluegrass, Hot Tuna, Keller Williams' KWahtro, David Nelson Band, Twiddle, TAUK, Horseshoes & Hand Grenades, Rumpke Mountain Boys, more
darkstarjubilee.com

Revival Music Festival
5/26-28 // Geneva, MN
Galactic, Yonder Mountain String Band, Turkuaz, Antibalas, Big Something, The Hip Abduction, New Orleans Suspects, The Lil' Smokies, The Main Squeeze, more
revivalfestmn.com

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Soundcheck

LIVE REVIEWS AND NEWS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE *Compiled by* DEAN BUDNICK

Nels Cline and Jeff Tweedy: "Normal American Kids"

Kristen Norman

WILCO

CHICAGO THEATRE
CHICAGO
FEBRUARY 23

After an opening night riddled with **Jeff Tweedy**'s apparent inner political turmoil, the second night of **Wilco**'s sold-out, four-show Chicago Theatre residency proved to be a more lighthearted escape from fans' everyday escapades. Beneath the intricate art of the theater ceiling, there was an ominous, deep purple backdrop of tree-branch shadows, and under a wide-brimmed hat, Tweedy led the band through a hometown show that the Windy City seemed to be preparing for all winter.

Tweedy kicked off the night alone with just the spotlight and the support of guitarist **Nels Cline** with a slow and steady "Normal American Kids" that eventually brought the remaining four band members to the stage. Two more tunes from last year's *Schmilco*—"If I Ever Was a Child" and "Cry All Day"—made it seem like the crowd might get a full album performance, mirroring a tactic the band used to promote *Star Wars* in 2015. The group made it though the show's fourth song—the haunting and fairly rare "Radio Cure"—before uttering a word. "We're just here to bum you out," Tweedy joked, likely addressing the reported mood of the previous night's performance.

"Company in My Back" was the first tune from 2004's *A Ghost Is Born*, an album that received ample coverage during the show, alongside *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* and *Being There*. The first song from the latter, "Misunderstood," elicited positive fan feedback in the form of cheers and high fives, as did "Impossible Germany"—a tune on which Cline and his guitar took the spotlight. "Thanks for helping out on that," Tweedy said after the energetic crowd provided backing vocals a bit later during "Either Way." Then, poking fun at the band's newest album, he remarked, "Here's another song off the album *Schmilco*. I don't know if you're pronouncing it correctly. You've gotta work up as much disdain as possible when you say it."

After a "We Aren't the World (Safety Girl)" dedicated to "all the globalists out there," Tweedy urged everyone to sing along while they could. "This is a fun song. We have the funnest songs," he said in an ironic monotone before commending the crowd for outperforming the previous night's fans. Prompted by the praise, the audience seemed to wrap its arms around each other as it belted the words to "Jesus, Etc." Tweedy was noticeably pleased at the performance, joking that he even tweeted about it.

Drummer **Glenn Kotche** proved to be a powerful and versatile force throughout the entire show, but his presence reigned paramount on "At Least That's What You Said." Then, after a rocking "Dawned on Me" that brought a shiny, white, double-neck guitar into the capable hands of Cline, and a "Hummingbird" that again featured the crowd on vocals, the band left the stage. The first encore was more of a mini-set, pairing three *Being There* tunes with "War on War" and 2015 favorite "Pickled Ginger." In an apparent attempt to cement its spot as a solid crowd, the audience took the lead on the second encore and final song, singing the guitar riff of "Spiders (Kidsmoke)" at Tweedy's prompting. By the end, it was unclear whether the band or the crowd was applauding harder for the other.

Heather Farr

THE BAND OF HEATHENS

KESSLER THEATER
DALLAS
FEBRUARY 22

When performed in front of an audience seated around candlelit dinner tables, an extended full-band rock jam might seem out of place—jarring, even. But in the context of this **Band of Heathens** show in their home state of Texas, rocking out was welcomed, even if dancing was less so. Although the crowd wasn't too keen on standing, they showed some appreciation by whistling and hollering. The flickering candles provided nice ambience during the Heathens' slower tunes but ultimately served as a reminder that this intimate gathering at the Kessler Theater was a celebration of their craft as songwriters. They appeared at the larger Granada Theater across town just a few months prior in November. The Kessler is a listening room. And there was plenty to hear—particularly in the wake of the January release of *Duende*, the band's first studio album in nearly four years.

The Heathens opened with a pair of tracks from that album, "Sugar Queen" and "All I'm Asking," the former giving a taste of the heavier jams to come, and the latter offering a radio-friendly sing-along. The setlist was heavy on *Duende* tunes, proving that the new material is more than capable of anchoring a set. Sprinkle in some choice older cuts—maybe a fuel-injected cover of Gillian Welch's "Look at Miss Ohio"—and you've got the makings of a well-balanced Heathens show.

This rock-and-roll cocktail party was especially conducive to stage banter, from self-deprecating humor to contemporary commentary, and even some herbal activism. The *Duende* number "Green Grass of California" wasn't about lush pastures and emerald plains in the Golden State, but was a Willie Nelson-meets-Jimmy Buffett, Southwestern homage to Mary Jane. The easygoing crowd—which skewed more senior than junior—seemed generally receptive of singer **Gordy Quist**'s messaging.

The Band of Heathens showcase **Duende** *during a rock-and-roll cocktail party in Dallas*

Later, with "Cracking the Code," the Heathens underscored a more pervasive theme in our society: smartphone domination. Concerned by modern concertgoers who seem to experience too much of the show through their iPhone lenses, Quist thanked everyone for enjoying the song the old-fashioned way, sans iFilter. They supplemented this screenless concert experience with a good old tale of human connection via "Maple Tears," dedicated to two fans who had traveled to Texas from the Great White North. The *Duende* songs continued with "Keys to the Kingdom," a chugging tune whose studio recording left ample space for improvisation. The live version did not disappoint, appearing in a set-closing suite of heavy-hitting rock jams that included "Hurricane," "L.A. County Blues" and the clincher, "Trouble Came Early."

The crowd was on their feet by the time the band returned for the encore, joined by **The Quebe Sisters**, a Dallas-bred trio of kindred fiddlistas. Together, they belted out a cover of Charley Pride's "Is Anybody Goin' to San Antone?"

All told, the Heathens showcased both their song-writing abilities and propensity for deep-pocketed grooves. And, if nothing else, the band proved that there's nothing wrong with a rock show in a listening room. ***Matt Nestor***

LOTUS

THE WILMA
MISSOULA, MONT.
FEBRUARY 15

While **Lotus** doesn't always garner the same attention as some of their jamtronica peers, few bands possess a catalog that demonstrates so much nonstop swagger. The quintet's two sets at Missoula's The Wilma spliced hip-hop, future-funk, pop, disco, prog and even post-rock into an energetic mixture of all things danceable.

The band cut to the chase and set the tone for the evening with a bouncy, 11-minute take on "Bellwether," rather than slowly building their dynamics. Reaching back to their early catalog, the group stretched out even further with a lengthy version of "Nematode," which preceded the brief riff rock of "Tarot." Lotus' latest record, the pop-oriented *Eat the Light*, set a new precedent for the band by featuring vocalists on every track, but most of Lotus' career-spanning show held true to their more traditional instrumental origins. Near the end of the first set, they finally touched on their recent release, bringing out Montana native **Gabe Otto** to reprise his vocal role on "Eats the Light." Otto's flamboyant stage demeanor, thrust into the midst of a band that has operated sans frontman for nearly two decades, was a jarring contrast, causing some longtime fans in the audience to pause. Collectively, however, the group transformed the song into the most driving tune of the set, building it into a frenzy until guitarist **Mike Rempel** dutifully stole the spotlight with a feverish solo.

Despite some early peaks in the first set, the band re-emerged after set break with renewed vigor. The rubbery pulse of "128" called dancers back to the floor, and **Luke Miller**'s synth manipulations spearheaded the discordant space-funk throwback of "Pachyderm." Drummer **Mike Greenfield** transitioned in and out of frenetic breakbeats during "Neon Tubes," pushing and pulling at the perception of time amid throbbing basslines. Otto once again appeared for one song, nodding to his Montana roots by declaring, "It's good to be home," before dropping into "White Light Fadeaway." And the band bid farewell with an appropriately powerful version of "Hammerstrike," with Rempel's blissful shredding leading the charge into the ether. ***Jed Nussbaum***

Lotus brings their "Hammerstrike" to Montana

Matt Nestor, Jeffrey Neubauer

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WINTERWONDER-GRASS

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, COLO.
FEBRUARY 24-26

The Colorado edition of the now biannual WinterWonderGrass festival has been a tradition for five years, but this February marked the first time it was held in Steamboat Springs. The move not only meant a more integrated festival-to-town experience, but also hospitable locals, hot springs and champagne powder. Starting with a pre-event on Thursday that featured **Gipsy Moon** and **Head for the Hills** at the resort's base, guests could ski fresh snow and end their day with live music. The festival's doors officially opened on Friday, inviting the sold-out crowd to peruse three heated tents, an expo zone and ever-tempting food trucks. As always, the vibe spoke to a community-first, quality-over-profitability ethos. The WWG experience really boils down to this: local food and booze, mountain memories and world-class roots music.

WinterWonderGrass's first night saw mainstage performances from Grammy Award-winning bluegrass act **Steep Canyon Rangers** and Colorado's original purveyors of "polyethnic cajun slamgrass," **Leftover Salmon**. No stranger to elevation, Leftover's set was full of mountain-centric tunes: "Take Me Back to My Mountain Top," the Grateful Dead's "New Speedway Boogie" and "Powder Day," banjoist **Andy Thorn**'s ode to ideal skiing conditions. Greensky Bluegrass guitarist **Dave Bruzza** also joined the band for John Hartford's "Joseph's Dream," the first of his nine sit-ins throughout the weekend. (Impressive, considering he wasn't even on the lineup.)

Later, after riding up the gondola with late-night ticket holders, Bruzza joined **Fruition** for another pair of covers: Ray Charles' "Lonely Avenue" and Woody Guthrie's "Pastures of Plenty." Other Fruition highlights included Manu Chao's "Clandestino" and **Kellen Asebroek**'s arrangement of "The New Colossus," which—based on an 1883 sonnet written by Emma Lazarus for the Statue of Liberty—is his response to the Trump administration's new immigration policy.

Political songs were something of a running theme throughout the weekend and popped up during a number of festive sets: **The Infamous Stringdusters**' "This Ol' Building," which speaks to an uncertain future, and **The California Honeydrops'** performance of "Brokedown," during which frontman **Lech Wierzynski** encouraged the crowd to stand up and vote—a particularly poignant message, given the country's current climate.

WinterWonderGrass lives up to its name

Dylan Langille

The powder persisted during Fruition's mainstage set the following day and turned the festival grounds into a virtual snow globe. Afterward, dazed fans faced a hard decision: hold down a spot for **Sam Bush Band**'s upcoming set or decide between California folksters **The Brothers Comatose**, Pennsylvania genre-benders **Cabinet** and Montana's finest pickers **The Lil' Smokies** on the side stages. Bush offered a string rendition of Allen Toussaint's New Orleans classic "Sneakin' Sally Through the Alley" and, later that night, joined the Stringdusters for Danny Barnes' "Get It While You Can." (The latter song marked the beginning of an epic cover run that included Norman Blake's "Ginseng Sullivan," Phish's variation on the theme from *2001*, The Cure's "Just Like Heaven" and the Allman Brothers Band's "Jessica.")

The cover extravaganza continued during **Elephant Revival**'s set on Sunday, where **Bonnie Paine**'s ethereal voice sweetened a take on Pink Floyd's "Have a Cigar." The band's originals also took on new life, thanks to percussionist **Darren Garvey**, the troupe's latest addition. Although the festival could have ended with "Grace of a Woman"—featuring just about everyone backstage—it was **Railroad Earth** who truly made the event their own. The sextet debuted a song ("Addin' My Voice"), revived an oldie ("Butterfly and the Tree"), nodded to Trump's folly ("Goat") and, tying many of the weekend's best sets together, brought Bruzza out for a few tunes ("Head," "Black Elk Speaks"). It was "The Wheel" encore, however, that'll have the audience reminiscing once the snow melts. ***Kiran Hebert***

ALO shares its Amour with the Fillmore faithful

Michael Smyth

ALO

THE FILLMORE
SAN FRANCISCO
FEBRUARY 25

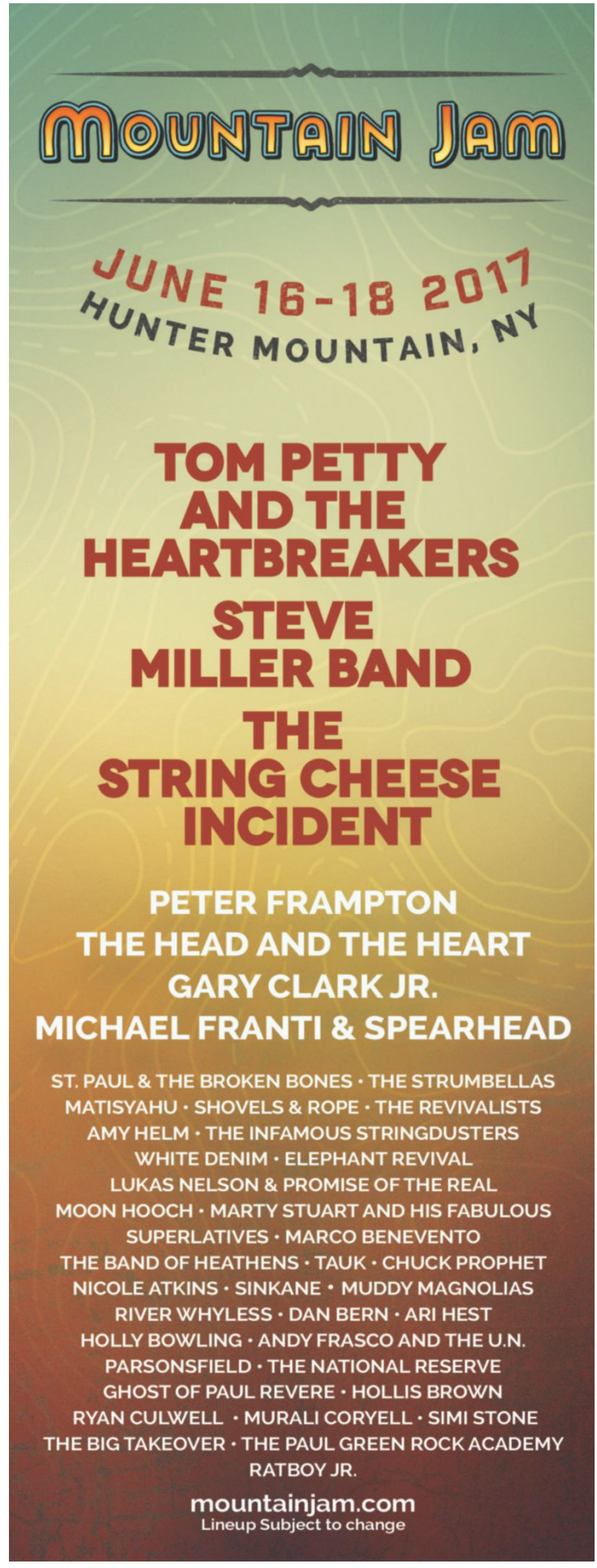
Every band has that one fan who has been there from the beginning and seems to be at every show. In the case of **ALO**, that fan is Dr. Bob. After the first show of the 11th annual "Tour D'Amour" in early February, he posted a simple message via social media: "This is the Golden Age of ALO."

His words certainly rang true when the group returned to their Bay Area stomping grounds at the end of that winter tour; the two-day, three-show run at The Fillmore included a "sing-along" matinee for kids and culminated with an inspired evening performance dripping with mutual love.

Dressed in colorful jumpsuits and furry critter hats, ALO seemed to have an absolute ball during their afternoon set, entertaining a near-capacity crowd of balloon-chasing, dancing, crawling children as they told stories, offered a mix of original and cover songs, and brought characters like "Camilla the Golden Worm" magically to life. The pure joy on the band members' faces made it clear that the "Amour" they shared engaging the single-digit-aged audience was sincere.

The Fillmore festivities continued later in the evening, with enough of a break for fans to put their kids to bed. After a high-octane opening spot from rising jamband stars **Twiddle**, an early highlight during ALO's headlining set was a rousing guest appearance by trumpeter/vocalist **Jennifer Hartswick** on "Piece of My Heart." Then the quartet showcased its collective energy, spotlighting all four members of the outfit in succession—beginning with bassist **Steve Adams** taking lead vocals on a cover of Johnny Nash's "Hold Me Tight," from ALO's recently released *Love Songs* EP, followed by guitarist **Dan "Lebo" Lebowitz** stepping up to the microphone for "Push" and drummer **Dave Brogan** singing the favorite "Walls of Jericho." The set closed with **Zach Gill** directing the groove on a fun "Hot Tub." The focus of an ALO show often tends to be Lebo's jazz-rooted guitar work or Gill's role as main vocalist and ringleader of merriment, à la Willy Wonka, but Brogan's deft anchoring of all the various movements, along with the modest, lovable and talented Adams, are just as entertaining and notable.

ALO opened their second set with solid takes on "The Ticket" and "Falling Dominoes." Yet it was the next three-song run that made Dr. Bob's words prophetic as ALO stretched their collective jamband legs with the annual "Lebo Leap" during an extended "I Wanna Feel It," the electro-dance jam second half of "Cowboys and Chorus Girls" and the whirling journey of "Shapeshifter"> "Harlem Nocturne"> "Shapeshifter." ALO and Twiddle then joined together for "Barbeque" with a taste of Gary Wright's "Love Is Alive" and Prince's "1999" before a final "fake-out ending" to wrap up an explosive second set. The Turtles' classic "Happy Together" served as a fitting send-off to the show and tour alike. ***Michael Smyth***



MIKE DOUGHTY

BEACHLAND BALLROOM & TAVERN
CLEVELAND
FEBRUARY 23

Mike Doughty remixes live in Cleveland

After spending his first decade and change as a solo artist avoiding his previous work in Soul Coughing, **Mike Doughty** released a reimagined baker's dozen of his former project's songs in 2013 that reflected his original musical vision. He used those Soul Coughing numbers as the meat of his 16-song set at a packed Beachland Ballroom, and the night reminded many in the crowd of the glory days of alternative rock and its sarcastic, cynical, middle-finger-to-hair-metal-and-the-mainstream. Although the audience may have been enamored by Doughty's reconnection to his past, longtime supporters also responded with enthusiasm to his reinvention of songs such as "Sugar Free Jazz," "Bus to Beelzebub" and "Is Chicago, Is Not Chicago."

Doughty kicked off his 75-minute mix of groove-oriented rock, hip-hop and poetry behind a Critter & Guitari pocket piano. He found the pitch and synthesized sequence he desired following a few squiggles, and moved into "Lazybones" before being joined by the largest band Doughty has ever taken on the road. Besides his longtime touring partner **Andrew "Scrap" Livingston** on cello, his group also included drummer **Pete Wilhoit** and the members of opening act **Wheatus**—**Brendan B. Brown** (guitar/vocals), **Gabrielle Aimée Sterbenz** (guitar/vocals) and **Matthew Milligan** (bass).

Doughty utilized an approach he's referred to as live remixing—improvising portions of the songs by conducting the band members through the use of hand signals. Surprisingly, he only included one tune, "I Can't Believe I Found You in This Town," from his dynamic ninth solo album, *The Heart Watches While the Brain Burns*. Among several other solo numbers, Doughty reached way back to "Shunned + Falsified" from his self-released 2000 solo debut, *Skittish*.

Always known as something of an engaged entertainer, Doughty acted as a peacemaker with a simple gesture to two men whose argument was leading toward a brawl. They got to stick around for a handful of tunes that included the lively call-and-response of "Oh My God Yeah Fuck It" and a double dose of Soul Coughing to end the night—"St. Louise Is Listening" and "True Dreams of Wichita."

John Patrick Gatta

John Patrick Gatta

ORCHESTRA BAOBAB

More than a decade after bouncing around the room with Dave Matthews and Trey Anastasio, Senegal's answer to the Buena Vista Social Club are still figuring out how to rework and modernize their native sound. BY RICHARD GEHR

FOR NEARLY half a century, Senegalese slow-groove dynamo Orchestra Baobab have persisted in a series of fits and starts. Despite changes in situation and personnel, though, Baobab's Latin-tinged, pan-African sound has more or less remained the same—at least until the dramatic recent adjustments reflected on their new *Tribute to Ndiouga Dieng*, which, like all of their albums, is a serene and stately meditation on the remarkable centuries-long transit of music from Africa to Cuba and back again.

According to Balla Sidibé, Baobab's 74-year-old co-founder, singer and current bandleader, the new album attempts to "search the musical folklore of our terroir in the Casamance region of southern Senegal, and rework and modernize it in the Baobab style." The first inkling of the new Baobab sound strikes you immediately. A kora, the 21-stringed harp-like instrument synonymous with West Africa's Mandinka tribe, twinkles and cascades amid the polyrhythmic percussion and deliciously syncopated saxophones of *Tribute to Ndiouga Dieng*'s opening track, "Foulo." New member and kora player Abdoulaye Cissoko, Sidibé's cousin, has announced his arrival.

Orchestra Baobab came together in 1970, when the owners of the upscale Baobab Club in Dakar, Senegal, poached musicians for its house band from the nearby Club Miami, where they'd been playing in Ibrahim Kassé's Star Band (in which a young Youssou N'Dour got his start). The defectors—singers Balla Sidibé and Rudy Gomis from Senegal's Casamance region, along with Togo guitarist Barthélémy Attisso—were joined by the great Mali saxophonist Issa Cissoko, vocalist Laye Mboup and, a couple of years later, fellow griot singers Thione Seck and Ndiouga Dieng. In short, Baobab had evolved from a cover band that played Cuban and Western hits into a mesmerizing blend of tribal cultures and rediscovered Caribbean rhythms. (Their rough-edged early beauty can be savored on the Syllart anthology *La Belle Epoque 1971-1977*.)

In 1982, Orchestra Baobab recorded *Ken Dou Werente*, the album that most enthusiasts consider to be their masterpiece. But the group's members were going their separate ways by the time of its release. *Ken Dou Werente*'s 1989 reissue as *Pirates Choice* on World Circuit—the label that, not coincidentally, invented Havana's Buena Vista Social Club in 1996—made Orchestra Baobab the international sensation that their members always knew they could be. For Western listeners, *Pirates Choice* was a smoky, smoldering slab of Afro-pop perfection. So, in 2001, Orchestra Baobab regrouped at the behest of World Circuit's Nick Gold and Youssou N'Dour, who produced their comeback, *Specialist in All Styles*.

Specialist's marketing included a charmingly awkward VH1 documentary. In *Trey and Dave Go to Africa*, Trey Anastasio and Dave Matthews visited Senegal to hang out with Orchestra Baobab. They joined the band for its Dakar homecoming show, which included the sweetest "Bouncing Around the Room" ever. When Baobab came to the United States in 2004, their itinerary included a stop at the *Late Show with David Letterman*, where Anastasio and Matthews rejoined them for a traditional Wolof-language number, "Bul Ma Miin" (Don't Get Too Attached). Sharp-eyed YouTube viewers will note that all three Baobab guitarists are slinging Languedocs.

Over the years, the group has lost members due to car crashes, attrition and professional responsibilities. The great self-taught guitarist Barthélémy Attisso—who once expressed distress to a *Pitchfork* interviewer at having to choose between music and law—has apparently made his choice and is sadly absent, with 27-year-old guitarist René Sowatche in his place. Yes, a lot can happen during a three-year recording process. In *Tribute*'s case, this included the illness of singer Rudy Gomis, who Sidibé reports is recovering, as well as the death of the titular longtime Baobab vocalist.

"We have a talented new young Ndiouga," says Sidibé of Alpha Dieng, Ndiouga's son, who's now part of the band. "Ndiouga was with us in London," where *Tribute* was recorded, "and endured his illness until our return to Senegal." Ndiouga, a "traditional Senegalese historian," according to Sidibé, brought a raw charge of Wolof griot declamation to Baobab's sound.

Baobab's Cuban heritage is readily apparent in tracks like "Magnokouto," which grooves smoothly along to an understated clave. After guest vocalist Cheikh Lô sings lines like, "I have bought a Coke for you/ I have bought a car/ I have bought Fanta for you," Cissoko's kora takes the solos that might have been played by a Cuban tres.

Like the Buena Vista Social Club, Orchestra Baobab seems to exist in a timeless tropical paradise where older musicians abide with dignity. We should all be so fortunate. But, of course, we won't be. As they sing on "Mariama," a traditional Wolof song performed here as a somber guitar-kora duet, "Success cannot stop you dying/ Kindness cannot stop you dying/ That is the nature of the world."

THE REAL, FICTIONAL ME

Almost a quarter-century since their debut, Old 97's return to El Paso to find a quiet moment amid the chaos.

BY RHETT MILLER

There is the guy, and then there is the guy in the song. The guy has a real life—messy and convoluted, marked by devastation and success. The guy in the song has a single moment that exists within the framework of the song and in the imagination of the listener. The guy will die someday. The guy in the song lives forever. They are both deeply flawed.

The guy writes songs for a living. He knows that some of them are lousy. But some of them are pretty great. One of the great ones comes to him at 3 a.m., in the back lounge of the tour bus, after the rest of the band and crew have trundled off to their bunks. The guy has given up drinking and smoking and the song is what is left, maybe all that's left. It's a sad song, but it sounds pissed. It has to sound pissed, otherwise it's just self-pity. He's wailing now in the back lounge: "All who wander are not lost," which is a pretty standard rock-and-roll sentiment, but then he completes the thought with "Just me." What? Who does this guy think he is?

He thinks he's the guy in the song—alone in that back lounge, with the intermittent yellow line scrolling below him, and the drummer's snores drifting in beneath the sliding door. He knows that the guy in this song is a separate entity. By necessity, the guy remains aware of the gulf between himself and the guy in the song. That distance lets him say anything. It lets him tell the truth. The shameful, awkward, fundamental truth.

But tonight, he's the guy in the song—for an hour or so. And it hurts in a way that approximates pleasure. The pleasure of release, unburdening. He gives in to this blurring of lines because it strikes him as a necessary

breaking of rules. And the song presents itself.

He has other songs in his pocket. He will deliver them to the band with a mixture of shyness and pride. Some of the songs were written with friends. When he writes with these other folks, it's easy to keep it clear who he is and who the guy in the song is. Writing with friends lets him laugh at the guy in the song and point out the obvious weaknesses and massive character flaws that are somehow invisible to that guy.

The worst sin one can commit during the act of songwriting is the sin of earnestness. The poor sap sitting on the stairwell singing about buying his love a cherry deserves to have his nylon strings smashed, simply because he wants us to admire the depth of his feelings. Feelings are gross.

And yet, here the guy is in the back lounge in the dead of the night. He's climbed into the skin of the guy in the song, and that guy is all feelings. He grapples with these gross things, singing, "I must love to be confused." He gets to the chorus and can't convince himself to stop after singing, "All who wander are not lost." He must continue to the conclusion that resides beyond the line of what is cool. "Just me," he sings. And the "me" in the song isn't some hypothetical, fictional dude. It's him. It's me.

I've been writing songs since I was 13 years old. Most of them were lousy. Some of them are great. I've also gotten better as I've gotten older. But I've gotten more aware of the process and my place in it, which makes it harder sometimes.

The songs on *Graveyard Whistling* feature lyrics issued from the perspective of a narrator, like every one of the thousands of songs I've written over the last three decades. But on this record, more than any other, I've let that line blur between the narrator and myself. Time travel was involved.

The 97's started almost a quarter-century ago, and we play songs onstage every night that predate even that milestone. Twenty years ago, we went off to El Paso to record our first record for our new major-label bosses at Elektra. The songs on that record examined the heady and harrowing ascent from obscurity to renown. They were written mostly in the dead of night by a terrified and excited young man who looked a lot like me and found himself slipping occasionally across that invisible border, becoming the guy in the song.

Twenty years later, having navigated a career that has exceeded even the wildest expectations of our younger selves, we landed back in that same room in El Paso. While the songs I brought to the band back then seemed to emanate from the persona of a naïf on the brink of a great adventure, these new songs feel like they are being sung during a quiet moment amid the chaos at the heart of that adventure. They concern questions of culpability, fear of judgment and ruminations on the afterlife abound.

I'm the guy, but I'm also the guy in the song. Please don't tell anybody.

Rhett Miller has served as Old 97's lead singer and rhythm guitarist since the band's formation in 1993. The alt-country pioneers released their latest LP, Graveyard Whistling, *on ATO in February.*

GREGORY PORTER

With two Grammys in his pocket and hundreds of shows under his belt, Bakersfield's greatest jazz export is still figuring out new ways to reinvent a classic sound. BY JEFF TAMARKIN

The old maxim that "good things come to those who wait" may not always be true, but don't tell that to Gregory Porter. The bearded singer with the booming baritone and omnipresent balaclava covering much of his head—"my jazz hat," he calls it—was already close to 40 when he released his debut album, *Water*, in 2010. This led to his first Grammy nomination and, since then, he's been unstoppable: Both his 2013 album, *Liquid Spirit*, and his fourth studio set, last year's *Take Me to the Alley*, earned him coveted Best Jazz Vocal Album statuettes.

Porter is honored, of course, but the best part of being on the receiving end of such accolades, for him, is that he arrived here honestly. "What I'm most happy about in my career is that I didn't have to put on any weird makeup," he says, laughing heartily. "I didn't use any formulas. It's been an organic approach from the beginning. I didn't sell out in any way. I'm still saying what I want to say. I just do my thing."

Porter's thing, since he emerged, has been a soulful brand of jazz that draws heavily on the R&B and gospel he heard while growing up in Bakersfield, Calif., a city known more for spawning country stars like Merle Haggard and Buck Owens than for swinging jazz vocalists.

"How did country music get its roots in California?" he asks, responding to a question about his exposure to jazz and R&B with another question. "That's the Southern migration, the agriculture and the working people. That sound also made its way into black culture, so it was a part of what I heard. Was I going to see The Temptations? No. But it was on the radio. That's the music that played when we were cleaning the house on Saturdays."

Ben Wolf

Porter's initial foray into show business came via musical theater, a format that he enjoyed and that paid the bills, but he now says that it "kept [him] away from totally focusing on music." In 2004, he moved to New York and, although it took him a while to get noticed—he sang in small clubs in Brooklyn and Harlem while also working as a chef—he was finally signed to Motéma Music and things began to take off. *Water* received glowing reviews, many of which praised his compositional skills as well as his vocal prowess.

One of the most powerful tracks on that debut is "1960 What?," a politically charged tune that references the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, the race riots of the late '60s and the civil rights struggles of that era. "That's me connecting to my mother's history in the South," says Porter of the song, "saying that if you forget, history will repeat itself. It's this archetype, in a way, of conscious music that says something, but you can also bob your head to it and be entertained by it."

Porter's family has continued to inform his music. "The title track of *Take Me to the Alley* is my family story, at least the sentiment behind it," he says about his latest studio release and his second for the Blue Note label. "I'm singing about my son. If I can do that—sing about my life and my loves and the things that are important to me—and still achieve pop success, still sell a million records without compromising myself, that's what I'm happy about."

Porter's approach undeniably harkens back to a golden era of jazz and R&B singing, but there's also a pronounced pop sensibility at work. And those who try to fit him into a single slot often find themselves flustered. "The jazzheads are still there, but then there are sometimes people who aren't into jazz, who may forget that there's a solo coming up," Porter says. "Or I'm deviating from the melody or singing behind the beat. Sometimes they hear the soulful voice. You can put it in any genre, but none of that really matters. That's probably how the music is supposed to be—in that space between the heart and the head."

The mutual admiration between the singer and his admirers worldwide is very apparent in *Live in Berlin*, the 2-CD/DVD package released late last year by Eagle Vision. The May 2016 concert features a survey of Porter's hybrid musical style and most of the songs he's become known for (except "No Love Dying," a fan favorite from *Liquid Spirit*, is inexplicably omitted), plus snippets of tunes by Sly & The Family Stone, The Temptations and Marvin Gaye.

"I wanted to capture some of the energy that we've been experiencing," says Porter about the live release, "and it's a good vibe. But, to tell you the truth, what I would really love would be to do it again, maybe in some small, quirky venue in Harlem."

With his heavy touring schedule, Porter will have ample opportunities to capture the essence of future shows—he played 220 of them last year—and there's also a documentary film in the works. Although Porter admits that he wants to scale the touring back a bit, to be able to spend more time with his family, his commitment remains strong—especially since success came so late for him. "Now that I'm here, in this place," he says, "I feel like most of my time is gonna be taken up doing what I'm doing right now."

POND

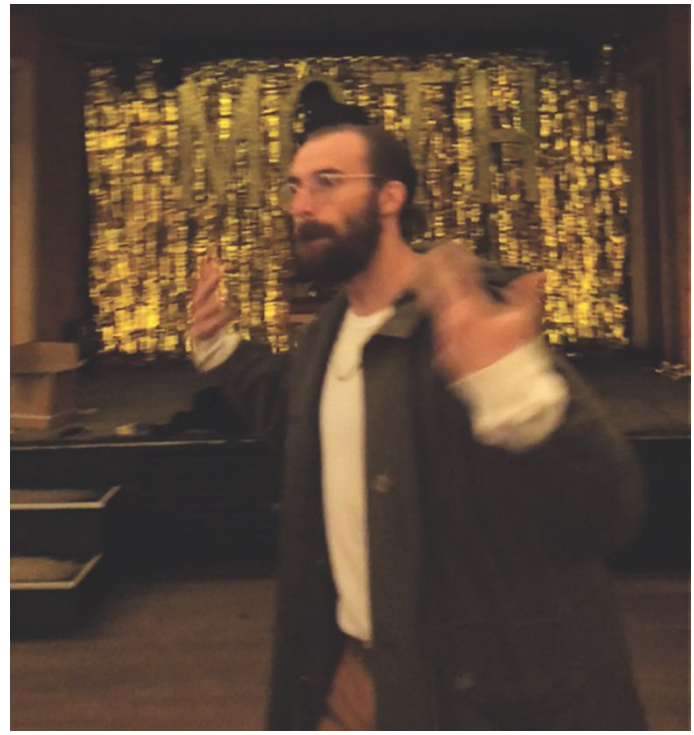
Nicholas Allbrook has described Pond's latest psychedelic-rock opus, *The Weather*, as something of a concept album centered around the band's hometown of Perth, Australia. But it's really about "the weird, contradictory things that make up a lot of colonial cities around the world—laying out all the dark things underneath the shimmering exterior of cranes, development, money and white privilege."

"It's not our place, but it is our place," he revealed in the album's release announcement. "British, but Australian, but not real Australian."

So it's only fitting that English audiences were some of the first to preview the outfit's latest batch of songs during Pond's trip to Europe in February. The quartet—Allbrook, Jay Watson, Joseph Ryan and Jamie Terry—showcased their new material, which marks a turn away from the band's garage-rock roots toward a more polished and direct brand of psych, during a quick jaunt that included stops at London's Moth Club, the BBC and the French talk show *Le Grand Journal*.

Like their 2015 release, *Man It Feels Like Space Again,* this year's *The Weather* was produced by longtime collaborator and Tame Impala mastermind Kevin Parker. (Watson currently splits his time between Pond and Tame Impala.) Pond will continue to bring the material from their Perth-inspired song cycle to life during an extensive world tour that will run through *The Weather*'s early May release on Marathon Artists.

Taping at BBC 1 (Kea Sheppard, Pond tour manager)

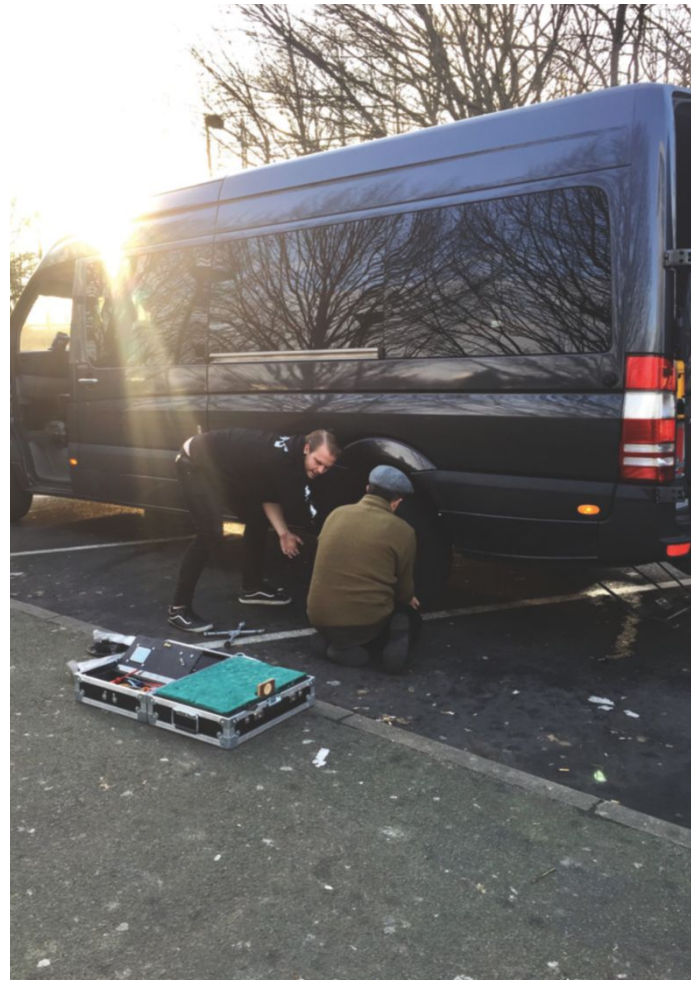


Jamie wilding at the Moth Club (Allbrook)

Gotta quarantine the Shred Zone (Watson)

Moth Club soundchecking (Sheppard)

Nick lights up Pigalle, Paris (Ash Maclean, Marathon)



Roundy hando (Sheppard)

Paris so magical tho (love heart eyes emoji) (Allbrook)

Trappin' at the BBC (Watson)

5 ARTISTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Southern Avenue MEMPHIS, TENN.

THE NEW, CLASSIC STAX SOUND

"Basically Turkish and Hebrew pop." That's how guitarist **Ori Naftaly** describes the music he grew up listening to outside Tel Aviv, Israel. But his father's record collection mapped out the path he eventually followed around the world. "James Brown, Miles Davis, Led Zeppelin, Muddy Waters and Albert King," he recalls. "Everything before 1976 was in that collection." A few decades later, Naftaly has assembled **Southern Avenue**, a deeply soulful Memphis blues band that's turning the scene on its head. The guitarist first arrived stateside in 2013 with his all-Israeli psych-blues act, The Ori Naftaly Band. "We sold the Americans what they sold to us," he says. "But touring on an artist visa, you're on a time limit. And I wasn't evolving musically—I had to change it up." That's when he met gospel singer **Tierinii Jackson**, who turned out to be Naftaly's missing link. After recruiting Tierinii's sister, drummer **Tikyra Jackson**, the new trio began writing songs together and quickly honed in on a distinct musical vision: fiery, guitar-led soul rock, with punchy horns, hard-shuffling beats, sparkling ballads and barroom throwdowns. Bassist **Daniel McKee** and keyboardist **Jeremy Powell** signed on soon after and Southern Avenue started lighting up the Memphis scene. Suddenly, things fell into place. An early EP grabbed the attention of the legendary Stax Records, and Southern Avenue found themselves recording their gritty, grooving debut with help from North Mississippi Allstars' Luther Dickinson. Church-approved, electrifying cuts like "Don't Give Up" and the gorgeous "Peace Will Come" offer timely doses of healing soul power. The buzz has spread quickly, and the group is slated to play a choice mix of jam and blues festivals this summer. "It's a live record," says Naftaly. "There's no element we can't repeat onstage."

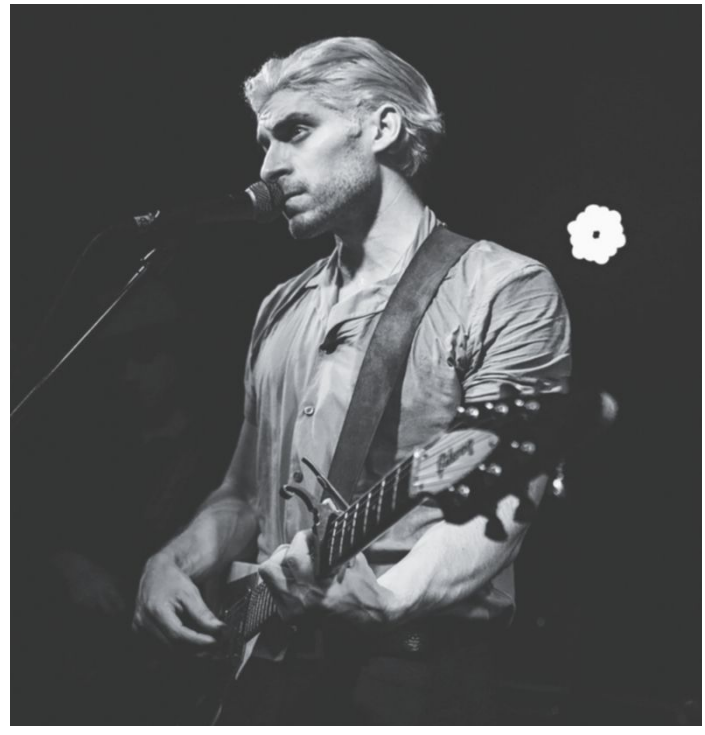
southernavenueband.com ***Justin Jacobs***

Leopold and His Fiction DETROIT

MOTOR CITY JOURNEYMEN

"Writing songs takes a lot out of you, as it should," **Daniel Leopold** says as he muses on his band **Leopold and His Fiction**'s latest record, *Darling Destroyer*. "It should completely drain you—every song you write." Leopold relishes his role as a songwriting student, constantly analyzing and listening to gather material for his next project. But at their core, Leopold and His Fiction, which features a rotating band behind the mastermind in the middle, are rooted in the garage-blues sound so closely aligned with Leopold's native Detroit. The guitarist and singer uses words like "vulnerability" to describe what lives and breathes in the music of Motown, but *Darling Destroyer* embodies much more than the "unpolished-ness" of Detroit. It also encompasses the music that Leopold absorbed during his stints in San Francisco and Austin, his current hometown. He finds inspiration in his journey. "It was like lightning," Leopold says. "And I was like, 'Do it now or don't do it at all.' All these songs just started pouring out of me." Along with the new record, Leopold also recorded a fitting tribute to the late Leonard Cohen, covering his "Hey, That's No Way to Say Goodbye," a number that connected with the singer early on in his life. "That song would just speak to me," Leopold admits. "It would just present itself, and he was saying it exactly the way I'm seeing this portion of my life. I would trade my whole entire catalog just to write one song like that."

leopoldandhisfiction.com ***Rob Slater***



David McLister (Southern Avenue).

MUNA LOS ANGELES
DYNAMIC INDIE-POP

There's a sense of motion embedded in **MUNA**'s music—a soaring, upward feeling brought on by the Los Angeles trio's dynamic indie-pop numbers. The sensation comes from both the group's synth-laced melodies and their introspective lyrics. The project—formed by **Katie Gavin**, **Josette Maskin** and **Naomi McPherson** while they were studying music at USC—first unveiled its sound on 2014's *More Perfect*, the band's first EP, but the group has since become more skilled and more focused. Their debut album, *About U*, released in February, reveals that sonic evolution.

"We mostly have dedicated ourselves to bettering our production skills and taking the time to make sure the songs are as strong as we possibly can make them," McPherson notes. "At the beginning, we did a bit more experimenting. We just want to paint relatively clear pictures of the human experience with which others can identify."

The members of MUNA self-produced the album, which has been accompanied by a series of lyric videos for each song. *About U*'s 12 tracks, surging numbers akin to Purity Ring's or Poliça's music, center on a thematic idea the musicians didn't realize was present while they were in the early stages of writing the music and lyrics. It's one that lingers

throughout the entire album. "Many of the songs deal with trying to fill 'the void,' or the general struggle of being stuck in various cycles pertaining to the ego," Gavin says. "I don't think we realized it at the time, in the same way that you often only identify patterns in your life retroactively."

The band's live performances augment the feelings brought on by the recordings; the musicians aim to generate a sense of togetherness onstage and offer as much energy as possible in both small and larger venues. (They'll present their dynamic show in front of kaleidoscopic crowds at both Governors Ball and the Firefly Music Festival in June.)

"We try to create a safe and energetic space during our live show," Gavin explains. "Many people say that our shows feel like rock or punk shows, which makes us very happy. We also want to create an environment where people can feel comfortable openly connecting with each other, expressing themselves and, hopefully, making new friends."

MUNA has rather grandiose goals going forward. When asked about her hopes for the band this year, Gavin simply says, "Peace, fulfillment and gratitude." She pauses and adds genuinely, "Sorry for sounding so pretentious."

Emily Zemler

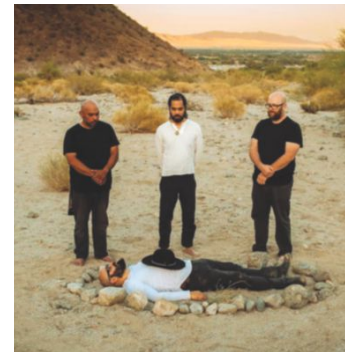
CBDB TUSCALOOSA, ALA.
SPREAD THE JOYFUNK

CBDB might not be your typical Southern rock band, but that doesn't mean they weren't excited to record at the legendary Southern institution that is Muscle Shoals, Ala.'s FAME Studios back in the summer of 2015. "It was an incredible experience," remembers group founder and lead singer **Cy Simonton**. "When you walk in there, you can feel the history. It definitely still looks old and has that vibe. When we first found out we were gonna have that opportunity, we put that documentary *Muscle Shoals* on, and I probably watched it two or three times before we went in there, just getting hyped up about it." CBDB's brand of rock-and-roll leans more on the progressive side of things, with a fair helping of funk and a dash of singer-songwriter flair—always with an ear toward dance-inducing hooks. "We try to keep it all over the place," Simonton says of the self-described genre the band has come to call "Joyfunk." "It's kind of pop, rock-and-roll tunes, but with the progressive stuff where musicians can hear us and be like, 'Oh, I see what they're doing there,'" Simonton explains. "But then, folks who don't give a shit about that can hear it and be like, 'Oh, man, that's catchy. I can shake my ass to that.'" **cbdbmusic.com**

Matt Inman

Here Lies Man
LOS ANGELES
HEAVY-METAL AFROBEAT

Marcos Garcia has Afro-Cuban music in his blood, so when he took a little time away from Antibalas, the band he's been playing with for 14 years, he didn't stray too far. His new project, **Here Lies Man**, takes the rhythms of West Africa, Cuba and the Caribbean, and marries them to the distorted sounds of heavy-metal guitars. Garcia says the gap between genres isn't as wide as you might imagine. "The guitar figures in Afrobeat are close to heavy rock-guitar riffs," he says. "If you listen to Fela's 'Yellow Fever,' the tenor guitar part is both melodic and rhythmic. To me, Fela's guitar riff sounds like a clave-based metal riff. Just imagine it with fuzz and being played with more abandon. I'm coming from Afrobeat, adding a little more blues and taking away a little bit of highlife from the equation." The eight sonically dense tunes on their self-titled release balance rhythm, melody and noise, with Garcia's distorted guitars playing off of **Geoff Mann**'s complex percussion textures. "Belt of the Sun" has a soca-like feel; "Here Lies Man" flows like free jazz; and "Letting Go" suggests an amped–up carnival sideshow. "Geoff and I agreed on the arrangements and got down to playing, going by what felt right. We weren't overthinking



anything, so I can't tell you specifically which subgenres of [Afro-Cuban] rhythms I'm drawing from. I'm letting the muses guide me. The music has a life of its own and I try to serve that. Everything you hear was intentional. If it feels a little jarring, unsettling or murky at times, that's a good thing. The aim is to have a psychological and physiological effect on the listener. It's dark and moody, with lots of rough textures and odd harmonic colors, yet it's highly rhythmic and even danceable." Garcia and Mann produce a panoply of sounds both familiar and unfamiliar, as the album unwinds, with dub effects, sci-fi keyboard sounds and horn stabs highlighting the arrangements. "There are no horns or synthesizers on the recording," Garcia clarifies. "I was running an organ and an electric piano through guitar pedals to achieve the tone and coloration of the keys. There are no effects on the guitars, other than fuzz and wah."

facebook.com/hereliesman ***J. Poet***

MAN AT WORK

Peter Silberman

Silence as Collaborator

A few years ago, before the release of his band's last album, The Antlers' songwriter and frontman Peter Silberman came face-to-face with a musician's worst fear. The singer and multi-instrumentalist developed a serious loss of hearing that rendered him incapable of playing or even listening to music, due to the pain it caused him. "It was definitely a really bizarre experience," Silberman remembers. "And it's something I'm still processing, too. I think I will be for a long time."

Silberman was at a loss as to what his life would be without music. But, eventually, he inched toward recovery and his return to music by finding solace in diversions like books, meditation and cooking. "A lot of it was about keeping my environment friendly to the situation," he says. "Because there was a lot that was hostile."

Silberman reflects on his frightening but eye-opening experience, saying that it left him with a lingering appreciation for the beauty of silence. The same calm atmosphere that was once necessary became an aesthetic goal for his music and his life in general, and ultimately led to him compose the songs that make up his new solo album, *Impermanence*.

"I'm very fortunate that thing was healed in a way where I could continue to make music," Silberman admits. "But it was with a new understanding of how I wanted to do it, with a new appreciation for the fact that it's not a permanent thing. A lot of what the record came out of was a realization that nothing is permanent; nothing is as stable as it may feel, and that can be a source of fear or a realization to keep in the back of your head all the time—to recognize that things are in a perpetual state of change and that I cannot trick myself into thinking otherwise."

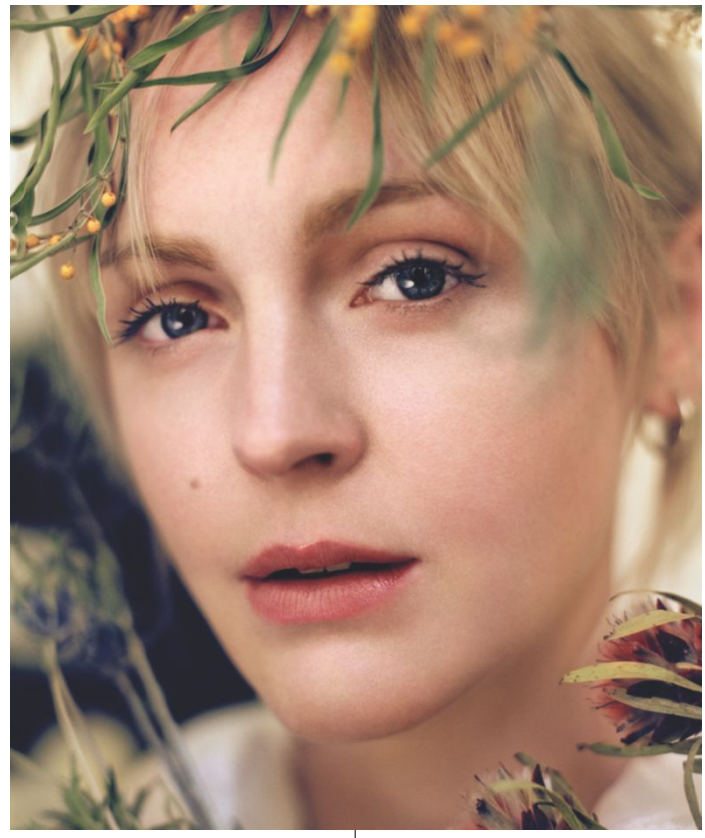
As he slowly worked his way back to a place where he could handle playing and recording music again, Silberman says he was feeling somewhat "burnt out" from his work with The Antlers and decided his next project would be a solo effort. And while the end product did include some of his regular team, there was another musical partner that was a little more unexpected.

"With this experience, I felt like silence was a collaborator, and the use of space was what I was leaving room for," Silberman says. "It created a different sound in that way, where I was intentionally leaving a lot of it empty—with the intent of not filling it up." ***Matt Inman***

WOMAN AT WORK

Laura Marling

The Eternal Female



Laura Marling has always been known for her emotional sincerity. She has a striking vulnerability that's intensified by her graceful melodies, the casual honesty of her lyrics and her intimate vocal style. "The songs are not confessional—they're stories," Marling explains. "I'm trying to frame emotion in a particular way and it involves a lot of imagination. I feel the emotion of the lyrics when I'm singing, but it is once removed because they are fiction." *Semper Femina* explores the tension between gender and sexuality, with a focus on real versus perceived identity. "I wonder about the effect society has on what we can achieve," she says. "It's something I've always explored. Everybody in their 20s is interested in that [question]. I just happen to have a bit more time on my hands to investigate it than most people." Marling crafted *Semper Femina* with producer Blake Mills (Alabama Shakes, Conor Oberst). They tracked her vocals and guitar live, then overdubbed additional axes and percussion to enhance the mood of the songs. The album is also notable for its range of textures. Marling's intricate, acoustic fingerpicking and tender singing guide "Nouel," an ode to the physical beauty of women, while "Don't Pass Me By" is a tale of unrequited love, complete with a bit of country twang. Elsewhere, brief bursts of distortion accent the despondent anger of "Nothing, Not Nearly," a coda to the end of a futile affair.

"I'm interested in the cycles of life, the make-up of a person and how they interact," Marling says of her song suite, which also touches on heavy themes such as infatuation, jealousy, seduction and the subtle anxiety that often comes with happiness. "How do we find the balance between masculine and feminine? How do we express it in the things we project into the world? To some extent, it's our choice, but some of it is our imagination and our desire to be unique." ***J. Poet***

PEGI YOUNG

BY LARSON SUTTON

PEGI YOUNG IS smiling and laughing. Given the crucible of the past few years, she appears happy to be happy again.

In the fall of 2014, her 36-year marriage to rock legend Neil Young—not to mention her role as a harmony singer in his band—came to a surprising end. The divorce, which was finalized amid very public rumors of Neil's relationship with actress Daryl Hannah, left Pegi, in her words, "frozen." In the aftermath, she found solace only in a familiar routine.

"I was writing, writing and writing," she says. "That's something I have done since I was a little girl."

Some pages were simply thoughts that she needed to let out—others, possible lyrics—but they all fit into a prevailing theme of loss.

She shared her stack with Spooner Oldham, who is a longtime friend and bandmate. The veteran Muscle Shoals keyboardist gave it to her straight. "I said, 'These sound like 'poor, poor, pitiful me' songs,'" Oldham recalls in his Alabama drawl. "She laughed."

"God bless Spooner," Pegi says. "He was so right."

Following a spring 2015 appearance at the Stagecoach Festival in Southern California, Pegi, Oldham and their Survivors guitarist Kelvin Holly sequestered themselves in an LA hotel room to work on the new material.

"I didn't have a single melody. Nothing," Pegi admits. "Over the course of those couple of days, I think we came up with the first 10 songs. I had never worked that way, but it was very productive."

Over the next 18 months, the trio honed two-dozen songs down to the 12 cuts that comprise her latest album, *Raw*. Tunes like "Why," "A Thousand Tears" and "Lonely" offer clear enough clues to the depths of Pegi's heartache. Each number, she says, was chosen for how much it helped her "get into a better headspace."

Jay Blakesberg

"It wasn't intentional, but when I looked at the finished product, I was like, 'Wow, that's like the soundtrack to the seven stages of grief,'" she says.

Raw is Pegi's fifth solo effort—a surprise to those who know her primarily as a backing singer and muse who recorded and toured regularly with Neil. It wasn't until 2007 that she stepped out on her own with her eponymous debut. It's been three years since her last release, the presciently named *Lonely in a Crowded Room*.

"In my modest catalog, so far, I do believe in the old concept of thematic relevance," Pegi explains. "It's satisfying to me, for my creation."

Pegi considers herself fortunate, at least in one respect. "I am so grateful that I have the ability to express myself creatively," she says. "It was extremely cathartic for me."

Oldham describes the sessions as anything but limited by the deeply personal subject matter. "It wasn't forced at all," he says. "It was just inspiration in the moment."

Pegi also recognizes that this record is a chance to empathize with others whose relationships have met similar fates. "Even though this is probably the most autobiographical record I've ever done, I hope there is a universal quality to it as well," she says. "It's not just my story."

On a rainy, cold January night, Pegi Young & The Survivors load into a rehearsal room at Hollywood's SIR studios to deliver a fiery, defiant private performance for a select few, showcasing new cuts from *Raw*. Pegi commands the stage, feeding off the rock-and-roll drive of her backing quartet. The setting is also strangely ironic. It was down the hall, four decades earlier, that Neil recorded perhaps his own most cathartic album, *Tonight's the Night*—part cautionary tale, part homage to bandmate Danny Whitten and his roadie, Bruce Berry, who'd both died of drug overdoses.

After the set, Pegi takes off her black leather jacket and reclines on a couch, curling her legs up under her. To be around the love and support of her band through this period, she says, has been invaluable. She's effusive in praising their talents, and is particularly excited by the addition of former Drive-By Truckers bassist Shonna Tucker to the all-star group.

And, of course, her face lights up when she speaks of her family. Pegi continues to support the Bridge School, the Northern California learning center she founded in 1986 to assist the couple's son, Ben, who is afflicted with cerebral palsy, as well as other children with severe disabilities.

"Making this record was very therapeutic in some ways," she says. "I just feel better in general."

Like her band's moniker, and as evidenced by the *Raw* cut "You Won't Take My Laugh Away from Me," Pegi has emerged an optimistic survivor. Pushing aside strands of her long, blonde hair, she proudly declares that she is still a card-carrying hippie, moving on to the next chapter of her life.

"I've never been one to write a happy song," Pegi says with that distinct chuckle. "But I certainly hope my next batch is more lighthearted."

SAN FERMIN

BY MATT INMAN

ON "BELONG," the title track of San Fermin's new album, Allen Tate sings, "There's a little piece of me that's always somewhere else/ But I'm right where I belong." And while the tune is filtered through Tate's voice, the words emanated from band songwriter Ellis Ludwig-Leone, who says that this new collection—the third studio effort from San Fermin—features his most personal set of songs yet.

"I've realized that, of the songs I write, the ones I connect to the most aren't afraid to look at what's going on in my life," Ludwig-Leone reflects, explaining that "Belong" was written about the dichotomy of being in love with someone and still feeling a strong sense of isolation.

The introspective themes kick in right away on *Belong*'s appropriately titled lead number, "Open," which Ludwig-Leone says became the cornerstone for the whole album—setting the emotional groundwork for the rest of the compositions. The songwriter employs his other lead vocalist, Charlene Kaye, on the selection, which includes lyrics like, "I am a ghost at the controls" and "I know you're capable of terrible things and we've been here before/ Don't act so alarmed."

"That song is like the voice in the back of your head going, 'Hey, you've got some shit to work through here. And maybe you're not the best dude,'" Ludwig-Leone says. "And that spurs this kind of exploration over the course of the record."

Elsewhere on the album, Ludwig-Leone's penchant for repeating themes—a habit, perhaps, learned from the musician's background in classical composition—comes through with the recurring image of the "little blonde ghost." This appears both in "Bones," one of the album's understated highlights, and the contrasting next track, "Dead," which allows Kaye to showcase some of her more bombastic vocal talents. Ludwig-Leone says the lyrical motif of the ghost comes directly from a book by English novelist Alan Hollinghurst, but he points to a larger idea of impermanence and the everyday dichotomies in life.

"I really like that image of this ghostly figure that's pulling you toward being an adult, having grown-up responsibilities," Ludwig-Leone says. "There's a lot of feeling like you're present and not present [on this album], and the ghost imagery played into that."

Despite some recurring themes on *Belong*, Ludwig-Leone says he was trying for a less composed project this time around, focusing instead on each track as its own entity. "On this record in particular, I was interested in the songwriting craft of it," he says. "That sounds obvious, but on past records, I was thinking about it more as a full, sweeping thing with interludes and every song playing a role in this larger thing. That's still true but, on this record, I wanted every song to stand alone, and I did away with the interludes and thought, 'OK, here's a chance for me to work on writing songs that stick with you.'"

Along with San Fermin's continuously impressive arrangements and bursts of indie-pop beauty, *Belong* finds Ludwig-Leone delving into his own life for inspiration more than ever before. With tracks like the aforementioned "Open" and "Bride," which pulls from a real-life aborted wedding Ludwig-Leone witnessed, the songwriter has slowly begun to shift his lyrical focus more inward.

"I don't know that it's a good or a bad thing, necessarily, to try to write in that way—in a more personal way," Ludwig-Leone says. "But, for me, it was growth because it opened up a whole new way of thinking about writing a song. I just felt ready to talk about those things and that I could be a little more direct in the way that I tried to write. When I was writing the first or second record, I didn't feel like I could do that. I didn't feel like I had that kind of perspective about myself to write songs that weren't bad, basically."

Even with a newfound personal touch to his lyrics, Ludwig-Leone remains more of a behind-the-scenes bandleader and composer at heart. (He still dislikes the "bullshit" and "stressful, ivory tower" connotation that can come with the latter designation.) "Even when we perform live, I stand off to the side," he says. "I don't really look at the audience. I'm fairly in my own head about a lot of stuff."

That's also why he's happy to cede the center-stage spotlight to dual vocalists Kaye and Tate. Both have released their own solo work, and Ludwig-Leone praises the individual strengths that each brings to the table. When Kaye took over for Rae Cassidy in 2014, Ludwig-Leone says that the band's live show "went to a new level" because of her onstage presence and guitar skills. (She also played with Guns N' Hoses, the Brooklyn-based, all-female Guns N' Roses tribute act.)

Tate, on the other hand, has been playing with Ludwig-Leone since before San Fermin's formation. The two have been friends since their high school days, and Ludwig-Leone, who produced Tate's 2016 solo debut, says the singer is still always the first one to hear anything he writes. "Our relationship is the thing at the center of all this," Ludwig-Leone says. "It's so crazy to think that we've been working together for 11 years, since we were kids."

He adds, "It's an invaluable resource to have someone who has known you basically your whole life, who has followed your entire music career since the very beginning. Who calls bullshit any time it's bullshit."

"One moment he's turning out **harmonically rich Paul Simon-esque art-folk**; the next he's digging into the kind of **good 'n' greasy Americana groove** John Hiatt would kill for."
- Jim Allen | CultureSonar (10 Albums to Look Out for in 2017)

"So here it is: what will surely be **one of the best albums of this still brand new year** -- delivered right on time." - Bill Bentley | Bentley's Bandstand, The Morton Report

"His words are autobiographical, **cinematic, blunt and honest.** His music is folk-rock, **raucous horn-rock,** dreamy pop-rock, **Progressive Americana and sweet soulful R&B."**
- Mike Greenblatt | The Aquarian

Roger Street Friedman

SHOOT THE MOON

"... the music he makes offers **all the ingredients necessary for mainstream success**... It's **the sound of serendipity,** fully **fleshed out and inspired."**
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DEREK TRUCKS

The Tedeschi Trucks Band guitarist checks in during a recent break from the road about TTB's new documentary Live from the Fox Oakland, *their next studio project and his uncle Butch's tragic passing.*

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

Stuart Levine

BIGGER, STRONGER, BEEFIER

There was a pretty major shift when our bass player, Tim Lefebvre, came on board about two years ago—the band just became bigger, stronger, beefier. We were in a really good place. There was this great chemistry and the whole thing got more creative. Everybody just locked in. Since then, there's been this steady build and a lot of creative growth. It was the same thing when trumpeter Ephraim Owens, trombonist Elizabeth Lea and singer Alecia Chakour joined. We did a live album early on when the band was gaining its stride for the first time, but we felt that we were now head and shoulders above where we were back then.

So we were ready for another live record and, sometime around when we did the Mad Dogs & Englishmen show, we realized that we were ready to make our film as well. [TTB hosted a tribute to Joe Cocker's classic Mad Dogs & Englishmen tour, featuring a number of its alums, at Lockn' in 2015.] There was a film crew there capturing Leon Russell, Claudia Lennear, Rita Coolidge and everyone. And the directors were so unobtrusive—they just allowed everything to happen, and it felt super comfortable and natural. [The Lockn' performance was captured by *Bob Dylan in the 80s* producer Jesse Lauter, who directed *Live from the Fox Oakland* with Father John Misty collaborator Grant James.] They put together a sizzle reel for a movie of that show based on Leon and the original band and, when we saw that, we realized we probably wanted to reach out to those guys for our film.

THESE DAYS AND THOSE DAYS

We recorded the West Coast tour this fall, and those guys jumped on board for five or six days. They traveled with the band and we filmed the last two nights in Oakland, Calif. Originally, we thought that the live record and the film would be different entities from different shows, but there was something about that second night in Oakland—the first night was good, but it didn't have the *thing*. Sometimes you have those days when you just feel it from the beginning: You're in a good spot, everybody is flowing and you're not overthinking things. The first night didn't really have that, but the second night did, right out of the gate. We started listening to all the live recordings from that tour, and I kept coming back to that second night. There was just something about the continuity of it. And the fact that it was also the night that we had filmed made the whole thing that much better, so the film and the live record ended up rolling into one thing. When I finally watched the finished film, it really felt like being on the road with the band—a very honest depiction of who this group is. I thought everyone's personalities shined through.

RELEARNING EVERY NIGHT

Writing the setlist for TTB is a balancing act. We have an audience where some people will travel from show to show on, say, a West Coast tour—we will see familiar faces—but it is not an audience that fully travels, so we keep track of what we've played. If we play Oakland, then I'll go back to the setlist from the last three or four years and see what we played there. For the most part, there's a running list of 30-50 tunes that the band's currently really digging into on tour, and we'll sprinkle in a song every few nights that we haven't played yet. If there's a tune that you've never played in a city, then you'll try to bust it out. Other times, someone will have a notion on the bus, and we'll work up a new tune on the spot, especially during a multi-night run.

At the end of the day, it comes down to this: you should play a song if it still inspires you and if you can still reinvent it and nudge it in different directions each night. I'm not of the school that you have to just change a setlist to change it. When I think about my favorite live records—whether it's the Allman Brothers' *At Fillmore East* or Donnie Hathaway's *Live*—these were people that were playing similar material from night to night. And there's a reason that their shit got so good. They were relearning it every night.

A lot of things came into play for the film: There were certain tunes we wanted to avoid playing the few nights leading up to Oakland so we would hit them fresh, and there were other tunes we'd purposely play to work out the kinks. In some ways, we knew we had the live record in the bag. And if we could beat it, great. If not, then we weren't overthinking it. But for the film, there were definitely tunes that we were saving and hoping to capture on that second show. When I wrote the setlist for the Oakland shows, I was intentionally thinking about the second show as the one that would be the bulk of the movie. We wanted to focus on tunes off our new album, *Let Me Get By*, and the things the band had been sinking its teeth into the month or two prior to the show. Leonard Cohen's "Bird on the Wire"—Susan and our mini-choir were in such a good place with that tune. It was magical.

SNEAKY WITH CAMERAS

A lot of concert films were in the mix when we thought about *Live from the Fox Oakland*. We were certainly thinking about *Mad Dogs* but, more than anything, it was just the warmth and the feel of the way that film was recorded. [The 1971 *Mad Dogs & Englishmen* documentary helped inspire Tedeschi Trucks Band's formation.] A lot of the concert footage I've seen from the past

Continued on page 76

The String Cheese Incident: Kyle Hollingsworth, Michael Travis, Jason Hann, Michael Kang, Bill Nershi, Keith Moseley (clockwise from top)

Scott McCormick

THE STRING CHEESE INCIDENT

Believe

BY DEAN BUDNICK

"WE HAD KIND OF a 'coming to Jesus' moment a little while ago," The String Cheese Incident's Michael Kang explains. "Now that we're into version 2.0 of our reality—and everybody lives in different places—we decided that it was important for us to begin a yearly tradition where we would get together and not do any rehearsals for tours or anything, but just work out new ideas—try to get into a band creative process, away from families and stuff like that.

"So, a couple years ago, we did a band retreat where we went to this house in Sedona, Ariz., totally out in the middle of nowhere, and just loaded all our stuff into it—it was just the six of us with our road manager, and we set up. There was zero structure to it: We just got up in the morning, cooked breakfast together, then went, 'Alright, let's play some music.' We'd play for a couple hours and we'd be like, 'Oh, it's nice out! Let's go for a hike!' Then there were breakout sessions when people would work on lyrics together. We recorded the whole thing and 10 to 15 potential new tracks came out of that five-day experience together. That proved to be the lighting of the flame for the new material that's being put out on *Believe*. We've since done that again at our friend's place outside of Aspen, Colo., and that will probably turn into the next release."

"To be honest," Kyle Hollingsworth adds, "[Michael] Travis and I were a little hesitant

at first because we were like, 'How's this going to work? We haven't really gotten together as a group and lived together.' I was nervous because some people write differently, and I didn't know how well I would write in a group, but it turned out to be a fantastic experience. By the time we left, we totally understood what it was about. Writing together, cooking together, hiking together—it was like a band retreat."

The material from those Sedona sessions comprises the bulk of the songs on *Believe*, the group's new studio release and the follow-up to their 2014 album, *Song in My Head*. As on that record, Jerry Harrison served as producer alongside engineer Eric "ET" Thorngren.

"We had developed this rapport that seemed to work," Kang explains. "So, for this album, we also really wanted to give Jerry a shot to produce songs that weren't written because, on the last album, the songs were already pretty much established. He didn't really have as much producer input per se, besides how it sounded overall. So we just wanted to go further along the process with him."

BELIEVE

MK: The chorus for this song had been going through my head for a while. I don't know where it came from, but it might have happened after I saw a U2 stadium show a few years ago. I had never seen them before in that kind of setting and it blew me away. Soon after that, I had this lyric and melody going through my head.

I haven't had a lot of time to be creative at home lately because I have two kids. When I get home, I'm changing diapers and everything's got to be quiet at my house during that time. But when we did the band retreat, the songs came together really quickly. We started working on lyrical concepts in the studio, but the chorus was always right there. The basic concept is that a lot of us, in whatever walk of life, sit there looking for happiness but, while we're looking, we can miss the fact that it's just staring us right in the face.

KH: This was one of the first songs we brought out at the very beginning of our writing sessions in Sedona. It felt like it was going to take off right from the first note. It's a great opening track. It really grabs your attention and all the background vocals definitely add a little bit of a U2-ish vibe.

SWEET SPOT

MK: "Sweet Spot" is another one of the songs that came out of our time in Sedona. Keith [Moseley] had the basic riff and stuff worked out already. He tends to write the hookiest stuff for our band, and he has a really good pop sensibility. It was just fun to

work on that song. I remember them sitting around working on lyrics, and he just ran with that one. It was another one of those things that pretty much wrote itself. It's become a mainstay in our whole live repertoire now.

One of the things that's been fun in the studio, and a lot of our live shows the last couple years, has been getting to work with great vocalists. We got to bring in this woman, Sheryl Renee, a friend of ours in Boulder who's a badass soul, gospel singer. I remember being in the studio and having her sing background, and we were sitting there going, "Yeah!" with the hair on our arms standing up. When you get somebody who knows how to use their vocal pipes, it's a next-level kind of thing. That was a really fun studio moment.

KH: I can often hear in Keith's lyric writing what he listens to at home. I might come in and say, "I'm listening to Vulfpeck" or something, and he'll say, "I have the country station on all the time and everything I'm writing comes from country songs." It's interesting to me because that's not at all what I'm listening to. The band is definitely very diverse.

MY ONE AND ONLY

KH: I'd worked with Bonnie [Paine of Elephant Revival] in the past. She played on a couple of tracks on my last solo disc. I love her voice. I think it's so unique and I wanted to showcase her vocals. When I got together with her, I didn't really have the lyrics done. So I hit her up and she was like, "Sure, I'll help you write lyrics as well." So we got together, and she came up with the chorus and I started working on some of the verses. We talked about being on the road a lot and missing our loved ones back home. So we worked out the melodies and went through it together, and she improvised the whole last half of the song. I knew that I wanted her to do a vocal on that track. It could have been just me being lead vocal and her doing backup vocal, but we mixed it in a way where she's very prominent. She has a unique voice but also requires a unique way to record it because she's very soft-spoken. You really have to be quiet. No one can be talking in the entire building or nine buildings over. [*Laughs*.] Then, she'll sing it really quietly and go, "Is that it? Did you get it?" "OK, we got it. OK, good, now people can go to the bathroom or do whatever they want."

MK: I remember we were watching Mumford & Sons at Bonnaroo, that year [2011] when they really blew up, before they became super mega with that first album. And we're sitting there going, "My lord, look at what has happened! It took a bunch of English folks playing bluegrass to blow it up to the next level!" So that left a big impression on us, like, "Wow, we have similar acoustic sensibilities." I think, lyrically, Kyle is in the same boat as me with two young kids. A lot of his songs have been about relationships, his kids and other stuff that's been going on. But we really also wanted to bring the vibe of that foot-stomping, Mumford-type thing at the end of it.

DOWN A RIVER

MK: "Down a River" is something that Billy [Nershi] actually had written a long time ago and had already put out. [It appears on his 2001 album with Liza Oxnard, *It's About Time*.] He played it for us a long, long time ago and we thought it was a great song but, at the time, Cheese was interested in being more of a dance band. So it's one of those tracks where we thought, "OK, it's great, but we've opted to work on more up-tempo, dance-style numbers."

But we're now at this point where we feel like we're willing to record anything and let it just be the character of the song. It was really fun to get into this one in the studio. One album that really affected all of us was Emmylou Harris' *Wrecking Ball*, and especially Daniel Lanois' big, lush treatment of these country-based songs. I think that influenced some of these songs, how they were produced and how we wanted them to sound. This one came off really easy. A couple takes in the studio, and we were off and running.

KH: We were all asking for more songs, and Billy was like, "I have this one here." Right away, Jerry really gravitated toward that. He thought it sounded like The Band, in a very low-key way, like from *Big Pink*. So we tracked the whole thing with the idea of it being a Band song.

GET TIGHT

MK: "Get Tight" was another one of those things that we came

Continued on page 79

TREY ALLEN

BY BRADLEY TUCKER

TREY ALLEN HAS traveled the world as the tour manager for some of the biggest live acts of the past quarter-century—from Widespread Panic, The Strokes and MGMT to Leon Bridges, The Decemberists and My Morning Jacket. But his diverse résumé extends far beyond the road. Along with photographer Danny Clinch, Allen created TourGigs, an online concert platform, and, most recently, he has ventured into the management world as a founding partner of the Sunday Supper Group.

"At the end of the day, there's a line of a million people that want my gig, that are working very hard to make it," he explains. "Whether I'm 25 years into doing something, or one year into doing something, it's very, very important not to burn bridges."

What was your first job in the music industry and what led you to that job?

My first job was looking after artists at Shoreline Amphitheatre [in Mountain View, Calif.]. I was basically doing hospitality and taking care of artists in their dressing rooms—things like that—and that actually led to cooking for bands. When you're starting out in that world, you do anything and everything you can. It doesn't matter what you have to do, you're just like, "I'm there. I wanna do it."

One night, I picked up a catering job at a Rod Stewart show assisting the kitchen. More or less, I was there to wash the dishes. I finished up the night and the chefs that were on the tour said, "We really dig your vibe—we had a great time working together. Would you be interested in coming out and joining us on the tour?" And I was like, "Sure, when do I need to be ready?" And they were like, "When the bus leaves, tonight." So I went home, packed my bags and worked in the kitchen for Rod Stewart, Pink Floyd and some Rolling Stones tours.

You eventually turned your attention to tour managing. Can you talk about that transition?

Especially in the music industry, it's all about connections. I had been a Widespread Panic fan, and I ended up interning at Capricorn Records in high school around the time the *Widespread Panic* record was released. That's how I met those guys. I did that for a few months before I left for San Francisco. Just through my touring experiences, and through the H.O.R.D.E. festivals, we remained in touch with one another. [Allen served as H.O.R.D.E.'s front-of-house production manager from 1995-97.] One time, when I was in town for some Dead shows, I also reached out to the Widespread guys to see if I could help them promote a show in San Francisco.

We had met in an interning type situation, but I think the band noticed, "This kid's into it." So I came home from the H.O.R.D.E. festival tour and the Widespread guys were playing in Nashville. I walked into the show to say hey, and their tour manager was looking for someone to drive their gear around. That led into a merch position with the band. I did the merch thing for a couple of tours, then the call came in for me to tour manage them. I tour managed those guys for about 11 years.

What was an early lesson that you learned?

I was at a Nirvana show at the Cow Palace in San Francisco, and I was very stressed out and I was running to go do something—literally running. Someone stopped me and said, "When I was at the Fillmore one day—under Bill Graham—there was someone else who was in the situation that you're in, and he stopped it. We don't run here. Whatever it is that you're doing, if you're running, you're showing a sign that you're kind of losing the plot. You don't need to run anywhere."

How did you come to start your management company?

I started to practice Transcendental Meditation. And through the meditation, and through [my quest] to try and make the spiritual part of my life better, I found a lot of clarity. I live in a wonderful neighborhood in East Nashville where there is this wonderful music scene happening. I felt, "Now is the time for moving forward with this management thing."

I would do these "Sunday supper" hangs at my house. I would have musicians, booking agents, attorneys, meditation teachers, masseuses and whoever come by. The point wasn't to do business, but we'd always get there. People would say, "You should start managing bands. You have 20 years of experience on the road—you should do something with that!" And I was like, "I know, but I need a partner."

I ended up finding a partner who was right down the street. Her name is Courtney Blankenship—she's actually the wife of Tom Blankenship, the bass player in My Morning Jacket. We started a management company, and we basically took the name from our "Sunday supper" hangs—it's called the Sunday Supper Group. Court brings this wonderful background in an area I'm missing, which is a history with labels, a history with tour marketing and a history with managing. It's the perfect yin-and-yang situation.

What have you learned from your management compnay that's helped you on the road and vice versa?

I don't have any intentions of leaving the road right now—I'm still tour managing the My Morning Jacket guys, and still working with Leon Bridges. I'm going out and doing a month with The Decemberists soon. It's really wonderful what the road part can do for the management part because, like I said, at the end of the day, it's all about contacts. I had an amazing run with Leon where I met the head of Starbucks Music—I was sitting there in Tokyo, listening with their marketing people to Ruby [Amanfu]. So one area really helps the other.

LONG STRANGE TRIP

The golden road from Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein *to Amir Bar-Lev's soon-to-be-classic Dead documentary.* BY DEAN BUDNICK

Long Strange Trip is not only the apt title of a new Grateful Dead documentary, but it's also a fair assessment of the process by which the film was made. Director Amir Bar-Lev, who grew up as a teenage Deadhead in the Bay Area in the 1980s, first put the project in motion back in 2003, shortly after the release of his debut film, *Fighter*.

"In June of 2003, I got the name of somebody within the organization, Alan Trist, who ran Ice Nine, their publishing company," Bar-Lev recalls. "I emailed him, and, to my surprise, he emailed me back. Then, much to my greater surprise, when I sent him my first film, *Fighter*—which is about two old Jews drinking their way through a road trip—he watched it and said he thought the idea of me making a documentary was great and I should move forward. At the time, I was 31 years old, I had only made one film and thought, 'My God, could it be that easy to reach out and get in contact with the right person and suddenly be making the Grateful Dead documentary?' The answer is no, it wasn't that easy. Eleven years transpired, and I got close to making it a couple of times and the scope of the film changed many times. In the interim, I made five films and then, finally, in a way, I was the last man standing. I got the job because I just never gave up."

During that time, Bar-Lev directed *My Kid Could Paint That* (2007), *The Tillman Story* (2010) and *Happy Valley* (2014), each of which explored issues regarding the ambiguities beneath commonly received narratives. He later applied this perspective to the story of the Grateful Dead. "There's this myth of Jerry Garcia as this happy hippie icon, Captain Trips, when, in fact, if you were a Deadhead, you understood there were many more shades of darkness and light going on with Jerry and his art," the director notes.

This also applied to the band's conceptions of politics and authority. Bar-Lev elucidates this point while discussing the documentary film *Berkeley in the Sixties*: "I love that movie, and there's an extra dimension of it to me because I grew up in Berkeley in the '70s and '80s, and my parents were involved in politics, just as most Berkeley people were. My understanding of Haight-Ashbury was colored by being the child of folks from the East Bay in that time. There was somewhat of a divide between those who felt that the Grateful Dead were perhaps too apolitical, too disengaged from the movement to end the Vietnam War. And then the folks on the other side of the Bay, who felt that if the Berkeley anti-war folks were so opposed to the system, well then, they should just walk away from it."

Long Strange Trip is divided into six acts, and the film proceeds both thematically and chronologically. Jerry Garcia appears in archival interviews, while Bob Weir, Phil Lesh, Mickey Hart and Bill Kreutzmann all sat with Bar-Lev. The director also spoke with John Perry Barlow, former crew members like Sam Cutler and Steve Parish and even, briefly, the elusive Robert Hunter. The film's visual, sonic and narrative components prove captivating from the get-go, and the documentary feels much shorter in length than its four-hour runtime.

While some of the scenes will be familiar to the Deadhead faithful, others are altogether exotic. For instance, Bar-Lev draws on rare footage of the group working out the initial harmony vocals to "Candyman." The hapless

Herb Greene

efforts of a British documentary crew attempting to film the band during their first visit to Europe in 1970 are equally enchanting. "The Dead did not like people standing at a reserve and observing them clinically," Bar-Lev reflects. "They wanted people to participate, not observe. And so the documentary crew that's following them around gets pulled into the story in a fun way, and that's what makes it great." He adds, "The fate that befell documentary crews before me, in which they were unable to complete their task because of psychedelics, did not befall me. I was able to complete my task."

Although Martin Scorsese is an executive producer and his name often appears in conjunction with the documentary, the famed filmmaker's role was limited. Scorsese was not a day-to-day presence while *Long Strange Trip* came together; rather, he served as a safety net in case something went awry. This did not come to pass, however, which Bar-Lev attributes to the film's subjects. "The Grateful Dead set a tone of selflessness way back in '65 that makes you want to do your very best—your most selfless. The people on my team, whether they were Deadheads or not, picked up on that and really tried to bring their very best craftsmanship. This was the case whether we're talking about sound design, archival producing, even legal work. Everyone gave more than they needed to."

Continued from page 78

SPIRAL STAIRS

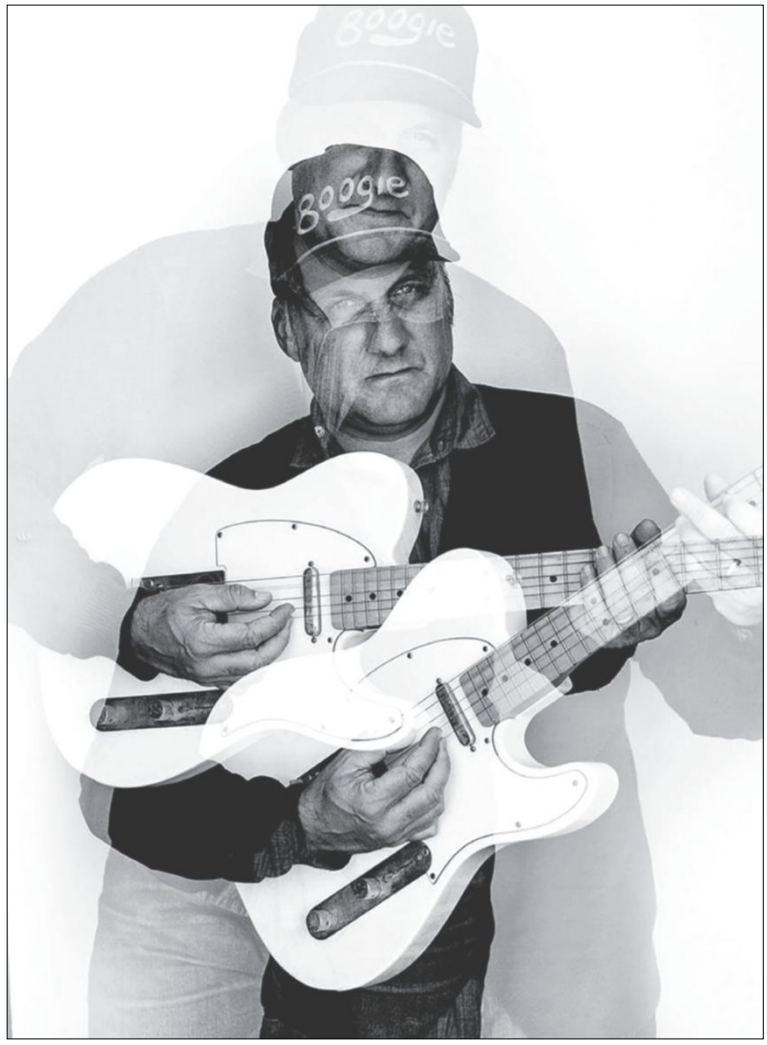
Pavement's co-founder and longtime singer/guitarist steps out under his own pseudonym for the first time in over seven years, with the help of a new generation of indie-rock icons. BY MIKE GREENHAUS

"I JUST WANT TO keep putting music out," Scott Kannberg says with a sense of slacker ease while Skyping from his current home in Mérida, Mexico. "I'm having fun doing it."

It's been a while since Kannberg—known as Spiral Stairs since co-founding Pavement with fellow singer/guitarist Stephen Malkmus in 1989—has been so prolific or really even played music on a regular basis.

After Pavement's acrimonious 1999 split, Kannberg recorded a few Preston School of Industry LPs before stepping out under the Spiral Stairs name with 2009's *The Real Feel*. He participated in Pavement's 2010 reunion, but the voice behind classics like "Painted Soldiers," "Passat Dream," "Hit the Plane Down," "Kennel District" and "Date with Ikea" has remained unexpectedly quiet since that victory lap.

Yet, with his latest solo release, *Doris and the Daggers*, the 50-year-old Kannberg finally seems ready to embrace his next act as Spiral Stairs. And, if Pavement's world tour has taught him anything, it's that time and experience have made him a better musician, without losing the loose, garage-rock swagger that's long served as his calling card. "Playing those Pavement songs again was really cool because we had such a long break that they felt a lot different," he admits. "We were also able to play them a lot more proficiently, so that helped—maybe that filtered into the way I'm more proficient on the guitar and with my singing now."



It's been more than seven years since you released a solo album, and you've experienced a number of personal and musical changes during that time. When did you start working on *Doris and the Daggers*?

Right after I finished *The Real Feel*, we started talking about the Pavement reunion and I put most of my energy into that—which was amazing and so much fun—but, unfortunately, I didn't get to do much touring for *The Real Feel*. I was living up in Seattle and I had just completed moving in with my now-wife, who's Australian, so we moved around during that Pavement tour and didn't really have a home. And when the tour was over, we decided to move to Australia. We set down roots and had a kid and just kept it real. I lived in this town 45 minutes north of Brisbane, and it was pretty rural. We had an acre of land and just grew a lot of vegetables, mowed the lawn, hung out at the beach. It was pretty fun, but boring at times.

I didn't make much music while I was there. I had all my records and all my musical equipment, so there was no real excuse, but things just got in the way.

We eventually got bored and moved to the eastern part of LA 'cause it was halfway between my parents in California and her parents, who were living here in Mexico. We put our kids in school, and I started getting the bug to write again and started on these garage-rock snippets, so I booked some time at the studio up in Seattle where I did *The Real Feel*. My drummer was living in Vancouver and my bassist was in Seattle, so I said, "Let's record really quickly like we did in the old days." [Both drummer Darius Minwalla and bassist Matt Harris are veterans of Kannberg's Preston School of Industry sessions.]

And, about a month before it was set to happen, Darius died unexpectedly. That threw everyone for a loop, and I put it off again.

Then I met Dan Long, who has this great studio in LA. We just started talking about doing songs there. In the meantime, Justin Peroff from Broken Social Scene offered to play drums. He was also really good friends with Darius.

Did Darius' sudden passing shift the focus of the record?

When I started thinking about the record again, I started writing different types of songs—dealing with him dying, dealing with other people dying, dealing with my life, really. Some of the songs [from the earlier studio attempt] were still around, like "Dundee Man," "No Comparison" and "Always Wanting More (AWM)." The last song on the record, "Doris and the Daggers," is the way I originally wanted the record to sound, and I think my next record will sound a little more like that. I probably have an album's worth of songs I recorded with Justin and Matt that I haven't released.

In addition to Justin, you also drew heavily from the larger indie-rock community that Pavement helped set the stage for.

Kelley Stoltz was a big part of the record. We've been friends

for a long time and I originally wanted him to produce, so I went up to San Francisco and jammed with him and his band and fleshed out some of the songs a little bit. It just gave me more confidence as to what songs I wanted to include. When I came back to LA to track the record, I knew of all these different musicians who lent some great vibes to the album. Matt Berninger sings "Exiled Tonight," which is a pretty heavy song that I envisioned for his deep voice. I channeled him a bit when I was writing it. Kevin Drew from Broken Social Scene was also hanging out in LA for a couple of months, and "Emoshuns," which he plays on, is a song that we had done together a really long time ago at this music festival up in Canada. We made up a bunch of songs and played them live, so that's been hanging around for a while, and it was great to have him finally sing on it.

Many of the songs that comprise *Doris and the Daggers* were written during an emotional time that followed both the intensity of Pavement's reunion and a period of creative decompression in Australia. Do you think that ebb and flow of energy influenced your writing approach?

Totally—I was living in my own cult out there in Australia. [*Laughs*.] We had originally intended to go to Melbourne, which was much more cosmopolitan—and had moved all of our furniture and records there—and then we ended up moving to this country town. And going from there to LA, which is just massive, there were all these upheavals. It's weird because, when I was in Pavement in the '90s, we would make records quickly and then we would tour intensively for eight or nine months and then we wouldn't do anything for two years. So I would go home and relax, and it was great. And

Pavement, circa 1992's Slanted and Enchanted.

then you get back into this cycle again. So it was kind of the same thing, just a longer cycle.

LA has become something of the new hub of the indie-rock scene that you helped shepherd. What led you from there to Mexico?

Northeast LA was really cool—a lot of my friends from San Francisco were moving there, so that's what brought us there. In the three years that we lived there, things just exploded. People from New York and all over started moving to LA because it was pretty affordable and the weather was good. It just ran its course. We needed to put our kid in school, prices started going up—just the hassle of LA made us go, "Let's go live in a cheaper locale and have our kid learn a different language. Maybe I'll learn one, too. Let's move down here for a few years, see how it goes and then figure out the next place." That seems like my life.

Part of *Doris and the Daggers*' rollout includes a PledgeMusic pre-order. At what point did you decide to go the fan-funded route?

I started going through all these old boxes in my storage space one day before all this happened, just to see what I still had, and I got pretty excited about it. If you're a fan of me or Pavement or whatever, there's some cool stuff there. It just brought back a lot of memories and, as a fan of different bands, I thought it would be cool to get a poster that was signed by the band 25 years ago. The big-ticket item is going shopping with me at Ikea, but no one has bought that yet. [*Laughs*.] But somebody in Boston bought a solo show. I'm gonna go play at his house for him and his buddies, so that'll be kind of funny. I've never done that before.

After Pavement broke up in 1999, you released a few albums under the name Preston School of Industry. What led you to release your last two records under your Spiral Stairs moniker?

I did the Preston records right after Pavement, and a bit of time elapsed after that. Even though I still consider the Preston records my solo records, *The Real Feel* felt like a different band, and I was a different person. And even though a lot of time has elapsed between this record and *The Real Feel*, it still kind of feels like a Spiral record. Preston is the link between Pavement and Spiral. [*Laughs*.] It's still got some very Pavement-y elements in it. If you go to the *Monsoon* record [Preston's 2004 release], it's kind of getting away from that a little bit. I don't know if you hear any Pavement in *The Real Feel*, though in some ways you do because I was in Pavement.

The first Preston School of Industry song you released was a version of Phish's "Axilla (Part II)" on the charity album *Sharin' in the Groove*. How did that cover come about?

A buddy of mine was a huge Phish fan, and he was putting together that compilation. The only contact I had with Phish at that point was that I knew they were huge Pavement fans and had covered our songs. So I asked my buddy, "What's the weirdest Phish song ever?" And he was like, "'Axilla (Part II)!'" which is kind of cool 'cause it's one of the easiest Phish songs and one I can understand. It's sort of Captain Beefheart, Zappa. I did it with the guys in the band Oranger, who I recorded a bunch of stuff with early on. I tried to sing it like a Butthole Surfers version of a Phish song. [*Laughs*.] I've never tried to play it again, though, because it's so tough.

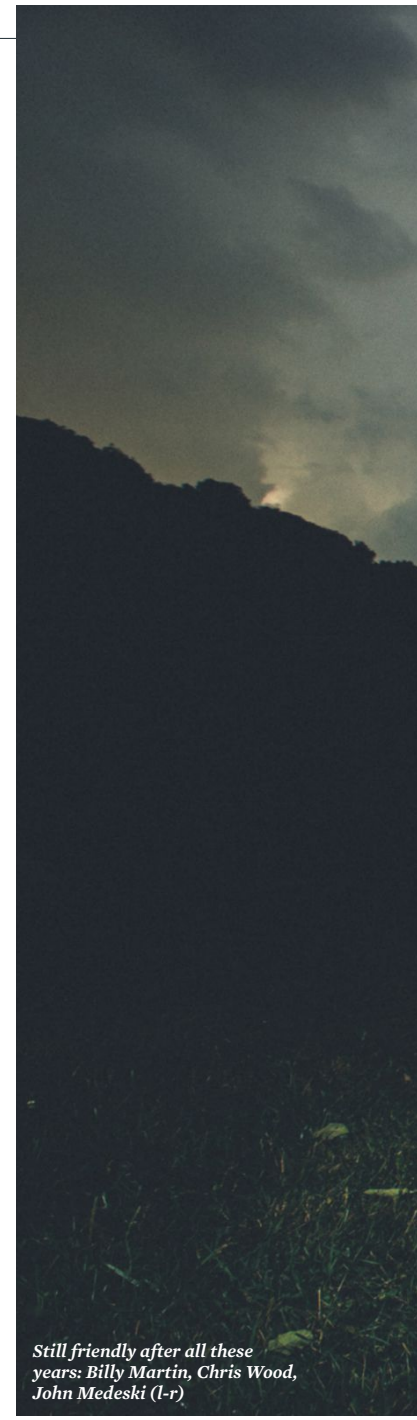
This fall, you celebrated your 50th birthday with two wild shows at San Francisco's The Chapel. They also morphed into quasi-Pavement reunions when you and drummer Gary Young joined Stephen Malkmus and his band the Jicks for a few songs. How did those shows come together?

The big 50 is pretty nerve-wracking. Originally, we were going to have The Clean, one of my favorite bands of all time, and Kelley Stoltz was going to play. And first Kelley canceled on me 'cause he went to play guitar with Echo & The Bunnymen on tour, which I'm so fucking jealous of, and then The Clean canceled because, unfortunately, their mother is very sick. So we were like, "What are we going to do?" So I called up Stephen and asked him if he wanted to do the show, and it turned into two shows, and it was great. I had this Roxy Music cover band, and I played a bunch of songs with this band the Dirty Ghosts. This great San Francisco band called the Peacers played, and I got up with the Jicks and we played a bunch of songs together. They did a bunch of covers from my youth—some Stranglers, some Echo & The Bunnymen, some Meat Puppets, a Clean song—and Gary got up and did a song with them.

We were gonna do a 51st birthday show as well with The Clean, but they canceled that, too. [*Laughs*.] Maybe I'll get them for my 52nd and, hopefully, I'll get over to New Zealand and play some shows with them. There's some talk of Hamish Kilgour, the drummer, playing some shows with me on the East Coast in June, so that'll be fun.

THE TRIPLE ENTENTE

Medeski Martin & Wood offer a state of the union 25 years—and one pause—after turning the Village Gate on its head. BY MIKE AYERS



Still friendly after all these years: Billy Martin, Chris Wood, John Medeski (l-r)

Michael Bloom

BILLY MARTIN IS FEELING nostalgic. Medeski Martin & Wood have just finished a blistering first set at the tiny West Village club (Le) Poisson Rouge, where the trio has been hunkered down for two nights to celebrate their 25th anniversary. After introducing his partners in crime, John Medeski and Chris Wood—as he has done diligently at every show over the last two-plus decades—Martin mentions how significant the space that they are standing in is to them.

"We started right here, on this block, at the Village Gate—right upstairs," he tells the crowd. "Unfortunately, now it's a CVS. But this downstairs was part of the Village Gate, and it was our very first gig together. So thank you so much for coming full circle with us."

Two weeks later, Martin is showing me around his property in northern New Jersey. Nestled in a suburb that looks like a lot of Northeastern towns, his home is weathered brick that is somehow still standing, even after years of harsh winter beat downs. The premises are also something of a rare find for Jersey. The backyard is deep, giving Martin the land to construct different spaces for his different frames of mind.

At the very back is a small Japanese-style teahouse he built by refurbishing a shed that was already on the land when he bought it. It's a furniture-less space where he comes to find solace, with books like Patti Smith's *Just Kids* and vinyl records adorning the floor.

"I've slept out here many nights," he informs me.

His home studio, which resembles a little wooden house that would feel right at home in *The Hobbit*, is also in his backyard. It's where he records and teaches. Inside, there's a faint smell of patchouli lingering and more books, CDs, stacks of hard drives and computers to provide on-the-spot mixes. And, of course, there's a killer-looking drum set.

After catching up a bit about the band's early days in the Downtown New York City jazz scene and discussing how MMW found a bigger audience after their music was blasted over the PA at many mid-'90s Phish shows, the conversation turns to the band's recent output—or lack thereof. It's not like they broke up or anything, but the days of MMW as road warriors have become a thing of the past. Their last recordings as a trio came in 2011—a 20th anniversary set of new songs simply called *20*. The group's segue from a full-time touring and recording project to an unofficial hiatus period was a slow fade without a major announcement, leading many of the band's fans to wonder what was happening behind the scenes.

"I was whining and complaining that I don't wanna be on the road so much," Martin says. "[I thought], 'I don't wanna burn out.' I was the first one to bring these things up."

These feelings started in the late 1990s, as the band's club following was booming. Band meetings to discuss the slowdown started a few years later and, as Medeski puts it, the trio "definitely paused" as the last decade came to an end.

"One of the things that has kept us going all these years is that each of us has our own creative life outside the band, in addition to the band," Medeski says. "We came together like that—three individuals with different backgrounds. The road gets weary, in any shape or form, but we never got tired of playing with each other. We're not one of those bands who hated each other, just getting onstage and playing the same songs they did years ago to get a paycheck."

Martin got married and started a family in 2000, when the trio was peaking in popularity. They released arguably their three strongest albums over a string of four years: 1996's dark, funky dorm-room breakthrough *Shackman*, 1998's electronic-tinged *Combustication* and 2000's *The Dropper*. After picking up a generation of listeners through Phish and the larger jamband scene, they purposefully conceived *The Dropper* as an album they thought would turn off both fair-weather party fans and their record label. Sonically, it was their most challenging to date, and the title is a direct allusion to the idea that Blue Note would drop them after hearing it. They also were touring nonstop, in both the United States and Europe. And the anxiety from being away from his wife and new baby got to Martin, often.

"When I was home, I was home—24/7. It might be a month, it might be a couple of weeks, just of solid being home," Martin says. "Winding down from the tour and dealing with being the dad again, and then being the guy on the road, I felt guilty—very guilty."

"Billy was the first one to start a family and struggled with that," Wood says. "He wanted to be home with the family, understandably. So I think that was really what was behind it. I was the youngest in the band,

and I'm thinking, 'Well, how am I gonna pay my bills?' It was not entirely, but partly, the incentive to start The Wood Brothers. It was sort of a coincidence that around that time, Oliver [Wood, Chris' brother] and I started reconnecting."

* * *

MMW'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY SHOWS were originally supposed to take place in October. The dates sold out in advance and some fans had even booked flights—and then Wood unexpectedly wound up in the hospital. He was out on tour with The Wood Brothers and, after a particularly rowdy gig in Augusta, Ga., he felt an unbearable pain in his stomach. It didn't pass, and he had enough sense to get to a doctor, pronto. The original diagnosis was intestinal blockage, but it turned out to be much more serious than that. Scar tissue from an appendix operation Wood had undergone when he was 14 was growing in a way that was wreaking havoc on his insides.

"It's not a complicated thing but, if you don't deal with it, it cuts off all the blood flow and then your intestine dies, and then you die," Wood says. He spent the next few weeks in the hospital, a rare moment during the last 10 years when he was forced to take a break from touring.

Right around the time MMW was looking to slow down, Wood shifted gears sonically and started playing with his brother Oliver—the two formed The Wood Brothers in 2004 after Oliver's King Johnson project opened for MMW in North Carolina. Oliver sat in with the trio during their set, and the brothers realized they had a strong musical connection. When MMW would get off the road, he'd immediately go back out. Creatively, it was a big shift: He would jump from playing improv-heavy jazz and funk to Americana roots music overnight.

"There was a little crossover at first," Wood says. "People were trying to associate MMW with The Wood Brothers but, of course, musically, it does not

relate at all. It's a completely different thing. So that fizzled out pretty quickly, and it was basically me and my brother in a minivan touring around, just building up fans and finding our voice as a very young band."

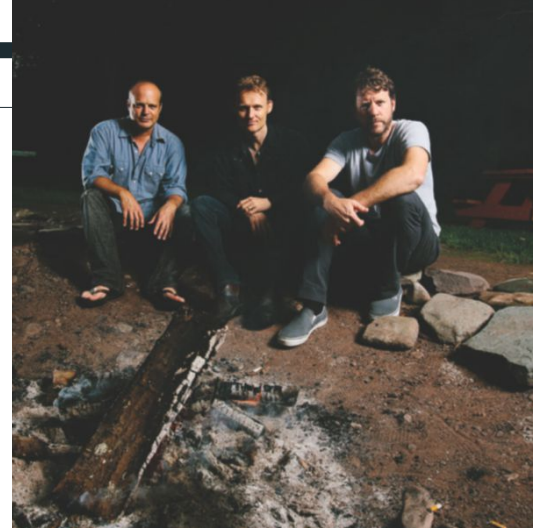
Since then, The Wood Brothers have released six studio albums and spent countless years on the road, infiltrating the roots-music scene from coast to coast. A few years ago, Wood relocated his family from Upstate New York to Nashville to dedicate his time to The Wood Brothers fully and pick up session work as a bassist.

"If all we ever did was MMW all the time, it just becomes too insular," he says. "You lose sight of what you're doing and you might get tired of it. It's always important to put yourself in a different context because you learn from everything."

Both Martin and Medeski feel similarly about this and point to the early days of the band, when they would play with different projects constantly and bring those findings back to the group.

During the past several years, Medeski has been all over the place—both as a studio musician and in live settings—and cites his work with the composer and saxophonist John Zorn as particularly fruitful. He's also kept busy performing alongside The Meters' George Porter Jr. and Zigaboo Modeliste in Foundation of Funk, as well as with a pair of improv-friendly trios—Fire Jelly, featuring guitarist David Fiuczynski and Calvin Weston, and DRKWAV, which includes saxophonist Skerik and drummer Adam Deitch. Mad Skillet, his quartet with guitarist Will Bernard, recently recorded their debut, too.

If that wasn't enough, this winter Medeski announced the formation of Hudson, a new supergroup consisting of drummer Jack DeJohnette, guitarist John Scofield and bassist Larry Grenadier. The Hudson River Valley neighbors spent time working on an album together and will tour throughout 2017.



"If all we ever did was MMW all the time, it just becomes too insular," Wood says of the trio's decision to slowdown and experiment with different projects.

Medeski left New York City in 2003 and moved upstate to find solace in nature, something he says was lacking when he was living in the city.

"I live in the woods. It's beautiful," Medeski says. "And that's where a lot of inspiration comes from."

The keyboardist has been multitasking in his creative life for years now, prioritizing other groups over his own desires as a solo musician.

"All these projects and incredible opportunities make it hard for me to find time to focus on my own music," he says. "How do I say no to any of this stuff? That challenge is along the same lines as touring—finding that balance between creating, being home and nurturing that, and being out playing amazing music with amazing people. Maybe it's a problem—but I'm not complaining."

* * *

THERE'S A THIRD, UNFINISHED structure on Martin's property—a tall building that he's lovingly calling "The Herman House," named after his first drum teacher, Allen Herman. Martin, who learned carpentry as a teenager, is building it from scratch. It will be connected to his studio and serve as a multifaceted performance space. He envisions theater workshops, musical performances, film screenings and more taking place on his property. It will also be an aid to his teaching, and he's already worked out a sponsorship with the Creative Music Foundation, a Woodstock, N.Y.-based nonprofit focused on music education, to get this off the ground.

> "One of the things that has kept us going all these years is that each of us has our own creative life outside the band, in addition to the band. We came together like that—three individuals with different backgrounds."
> **JOHN MEDESKI**

Teaching has been one of the drummer's primary focuses over the last decade but, even though he finds it rewarding and much more in line with his desired lifestyle, he admits that times have been tough in recent years.

"I've been on the brink of having to sell the house," Martin says. "It's been very stressful. We just cut costs as a family and it's still hard. I don't have any security other than my intellectual property and my integrity, and so the only thing that I know that I have is something to offer, which is education, new work and collaborations."

When asked whether MMW would do a full-blown tour like the band did in the old days, he emphatically says no. But that doesn't mean they don't have plans going forward. There's a live album that they recorded in 2015 with the Alarm Will Sound chamber orchestra that features new pieces by Medeski and Martin, as well as new spins on MMW tunes like "Uninvisible" and "End of the World Party." They're currently figuring out the best way to release it.

There's also a documentary about the band in the works and, if all goes well, they hope to reconvene at the fabled Shack recording studio in Hawaii, where they recorded *Shack-man*, to make a new record and film it for the documentary. Scheduling is tricky, of course, but all three members are game.

"The thing is, we have to rebuild the Shack," Martin says of the prospect of returning to the site. "It's completely almost melted into the jungle there."

"I'd love to have another opportunity to make a record that way," Medeski adds. "When I think about all of our individual projects, there's something about the three of us—we keep each other in check in a lot of ways, musically and artistically. Whenever we get back together, there's more to add. The common ground we find is pretty broad."

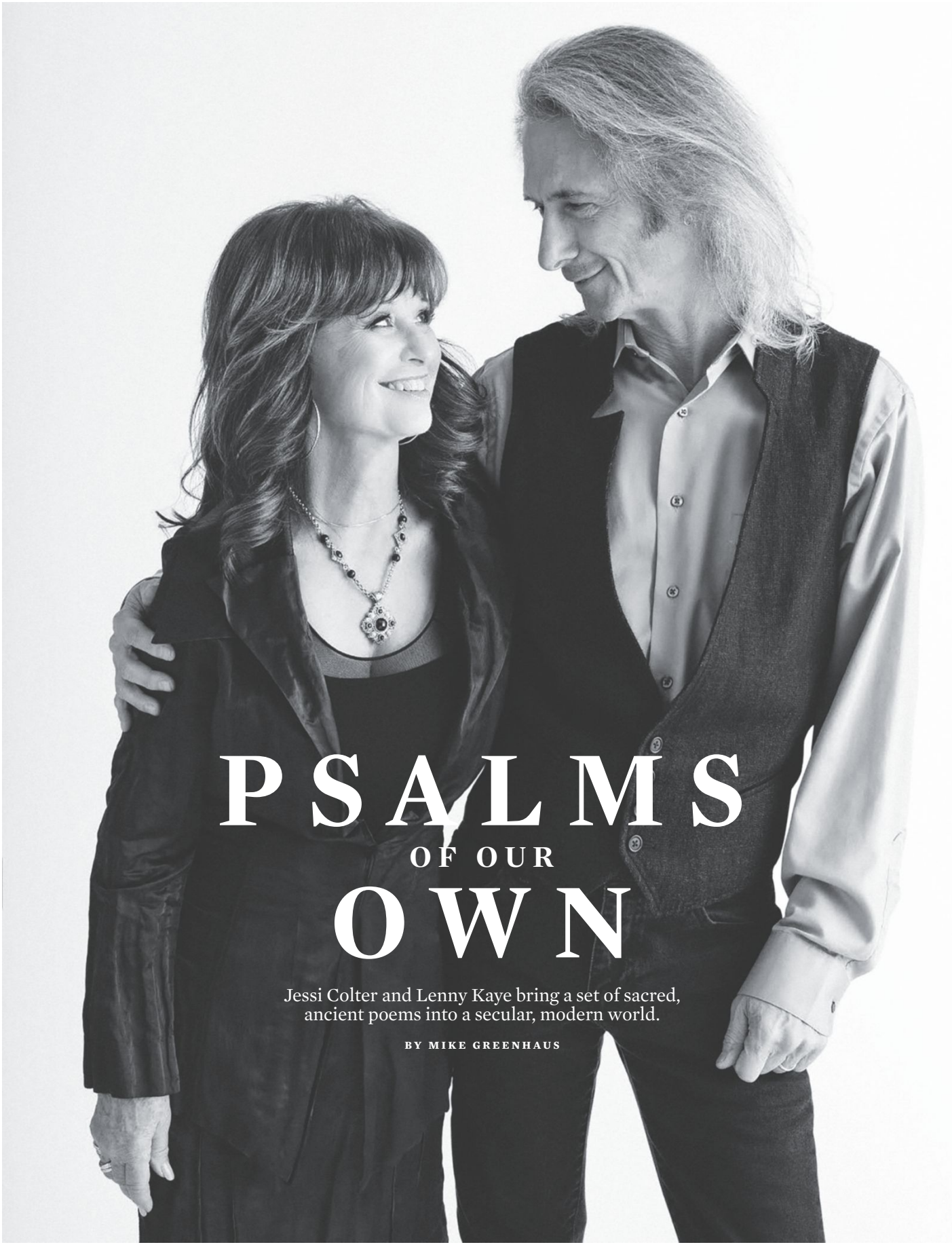
Medeski also fantasizes about recording an album with the trio and their longtime guitar collaborator Marc Ribot one day.

Along with teaching and building The Herman House, Martin is writing a script for a movie that he hopes to make someday soon. It's about a young drummer in the Lower East Side of New York City, learning to navigate life and music in the early '90s.

For now, MMW are content to play occasional gigs, with the knowledge that the three of them still retain the instant connection that they felt when they first got together 25 years ago and played at a West Village club that's now a CVS.

"We love each other—but I have a new chapter in my life," Martin says. "To have a creative life, whether it's visual art, composing music, filmmaking, teaching—it's a creative process for me. All these things are jobs that I can supplement my living with. And it just gives me more freedom to be home and work on these things."

Michael Bloom



PSALMS OF OUR OWN

Jessi Colter and Lenny Kaye bring a set of sacred, ancient poems into a secular, modern world.

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

LENNY KAYE WAS WORKING undercover when he had a moment of divine inspiration. It was 1995 and Kaye—an icon of New York's East Village best known as Patti Smith's longtime guitarist and the curator of the proto-punk holy grail, *Nuggets*—was camped out in Nashville, helping outlaw-country legend Waylon Jennings with his memoir.

"I went down there just as a writer," Kaye recounts more than 20 years after the publication of their finished project, *Waylon: An Autobiography*. "Waylon didn't have any knowledge of my background, and that's the way I like it. It wasn't about me; it was about him. And slowly, as we became friendly, he would find out that I was a producer and a musician, and he enjoyed that. We would go to a party in Nashville, and the younger country cowboys would come up and say, 'What are you doing here?'"

Kaye, who proudly reminisces that Jennings affectionately referred to him as his "New York hippie," truly immersed himself in his foreign surroundings—staying at Jenning's home, traveling between shows on his tour bus and observing one of his favorite sacred string instruments, the pedal-steel guitar, in its natural habitat. And, one morning, he wandered into Jennings' living room and found his wife, Jessi Colter, running through a set of Psalms at the piano. Her interpretations inspired Kaye and, ultimately, laid the groundwork for *The Psalms*, the rare 21st-century record to reclaim a set of holy passages for a spiritual, secular, live-music world.

"She had the Bible open and was just singing away—her hands on the keys, making chords," Kaye says. "There was no sense that she was writing songs; she was just singing whatever came to mind. It was very inspirational and very instantaneous. It truly brought out the beauty of these sacred poems, and I watched it, just awestruck."

A Nashville legend in her own right, Colter, who is now 73 and returned to her hometown of Phoenix when Jennings fell ill, has floated between the pop and outlaw worlds for years, thanks to her 1975 crossover hit, "I'm Not Lisa." The lone female on the landmark survey, *Wanted! The Outlaws*, Colter has never been shy about trying out different styles—whether that means working with Johnny Cash and Stevie Nicks in the '80s or recording children's music in the '90s. She's also been romantically involved with two genre-defining artists: Jennings, whom she married in 1969, and Duane Eddy, the pioneering rock-and-roll guitarist she wed seven years earlier.

Colter, who was raised in the Pentecostal community, spent the early part of her life as a church pianist. It was a disciplined study; she started taking lessons when she was 5 years old, wrote her own music as a preteen and played for congregations and television shows throughout Arizona. "My mother came here from Indiana in the '30s, was healed supernaturally of tuberculosis and began seeking the ministry—three years of fasting and praying," Colter says. "She became a minister in those years. The hymns that the Pentecostals sing are much like the hymns the Baptists sing. They're age-old, wonderful hymns, but they have a lot of verses. They were ingrained in me—I would play four or five times a week at a minimum."

A few years after Jennings passed away in 2002 due to diabetic complications, Kaye reached out to Colter while she was working on her first album in over a decade, *Out of the Ashes*, with Don Was. "I said, 'You know, there's a record I'd like to hear, and that's you singing the Psalms as I witnessed that day,'" Kaye remembers.

So, in 2007, while visiting her son, Shooter, and his then-partner, *Sopranos* star Drea de Matteo, in New York, Colter joined Kaye for two casual afternoon sessions.

"We didn't plan anything, we didn't rehearse, we didn't think about it too much," Kaye says. "I was really anxious to keep the spontaneity that I saw that day—that sense of no real destination." He recorded Colter as she worked through a selection of the 150 Psalms King David—the biblical shepherd boy who grew into a warrior and the king of Israel and Judah—wrote between approximately 1440 B.C. and 586 B.C.

Kaye says they focused on passages "that weren't about blood and retribution, [but rather] the ones about healing and the companionship of God." Sometimes, Kaye would pick up his guitar and accompany Colter; other times, he simply observed while she played the piano. He points to "Psalm 114," which includes the line, "And the mountains skipped like lambs," as a passage that started as a warm-up meditation but "gave [Kaye] a beautiful canvas in which to dab in a few colors here and there."

Since her husband's passing, Colter says she's been "drinking freely from this fountain of the Psalms," and has listened to them "every day since he made his crossing." She admits, "The poetry is what really comforted me. So there is something special about taking something that you, as a writer, are really drawing from and distilling it."

> "We didn't plan anything, we didn't rehearse, we didn't think about it too much. I was really anxious to keep the spontaneity that I saw that day—that sense of no real destination."
> LENNY KAYE

Colter and Kaye captured seven Psalms during their first weekend together and, in early 2008, they reconvened in New York for another sitting that produced an additional five cuts. But the album remained a passion project on the back burner while they figured out how to flesh out the recordings and eventually release them. Over time, Kaye brought in a few extra hands for some light overdubs and unobtrusive backing tracks—like organist Al Kooper, whom Kaye had interviewed in a previous life as a young music journalist; Downtown New York jazz drummer Bobby Previte, who Kaye stumbled on one night while taking in a show at the East Village club Banjo Jims; and sensitive, artful bassist Paul Dugan.

Their overarching goal was to maintain the sessions' live feel. In certain places, the group channeled a New Orleans rhythm; in others, Kaye carved out an airier, more avant-garde space. Balkan vocal group Black Sea Hotel added a hauntingly beautiful Bulgarian chorus to "Psalm 21," while Jesse Lauter, known for his work with The Low Anthem, Tedeschi Trucks Band and Elvis Perkins, came in to engineer the sessions and sweeten the recordings. After years of tweaking, they were able to turn Colter's performances into touching slices of modern Americana. Their overall motto was inspired by Kaye's friend Allen Ginsberg: "First thought, best thought."

"Lenny instinctively knew whether a song needed additional arranging based off Jessi's initial performances," Lauter explains. "He never chased an instrument or a voice. He knew precisely what he wanted on each Psalm, even if it was something as obscure as the arco bass or Bulgarian singing. For Lenny, passion, spontaneity and spirituality all go hand in hand. The overdubs needed to complement the basic tracks,

which were cut live with Jessi at a piano over a matter of days, so in order for the overdubs to fit, they had to be cut in a similar spontaneous fashion. When Lenny was feeling the spirit, we knew it was time to go to the studio, and we generally overdubbed complete takes over the basic track. That is what elevated these Psalms to the sacred heights you hear on the record."

"To me, this album is within the tradition of those nights where the Dead would just open the gates of improvisation to allow melody and rhythm to flow within them," says Kaye, who saw the Grateful Dead during their first New York trip in 1967. "I am sure those nights I spent watching 'St. Stephen' or 'Dark Star' unfold came into the making of this album—opening yourself to moving into the realm of music."

* * *

THE PSALMS, WHICH ARRIVED under Colter's name in March via Legacy Recordings, represents several of the intertwined major Western religions. Kaye, who identifies with the Conservative Jewish movement, spent years studying King David's poems and exploring various translations and interpretations of the sacred text. He found himself drawn to the moral truths that still apply in an agnostic 21st-century society.

"I approached them in a nondenominational way—I don't think that these beautiful poems belong to any religion," says Kaye. "I wanted to make sure that they looked through the mythologies and the touchstones of any sect to the light itself. To me, that's what religion is about—we all have our different ways of expressing it. I'm Jewish; I have a certain way in which I like to celebrate the glory of existence. Jessi is Christian but, to me, all religions are illuminated by the same glory, and I wanted you to feel like you could be touched by the album's light even if you don't believe in a specific religion. We are in this universe, and we don't know why this universe exists, but it's a beautiful place in which we are all given life."

"They're for everybody, and they are so mindful of the human condition," Colter says of the Psalms. "David was such a great warrior and he would, at times, war with God."

David McOlster

When Kaye came to the studio to record with Colter, he brought along the Bible that was given to him for his bar mitzvah for her to sing off of. Colter noticed slight variations between a few Bibles in her orbit when she transcribed the lyric sheets so she could work at home. (She also used an Oxford Bible that Jennings had given her). They ended up creating a beautiful interfaith blend of "The Book of Psalms."

"There were a few times where I thought, 'What version of the Bible is this?' But it's not that different than the King James Bible, which I always go back to," she says. "I played with it a little, but not much. I liked the line, 'You turned the rock into a pool,' better in Lenny's Jewish Bible than, 'The hard rock of flint into many waters,' that I'm used to, so that's what I sang."

Despite his producer credit, Kaye says he let Colter sing the Psalms as she saw fit: "I'm sure she was accessing those moments where she would sit and just put the Bible up on the stand and sing along and say, 'We're open to the miracle that is making music.'"

Colter also consulted her "doctor of music," Kenneth LaFave, who explained that the Psalms are the rare text handed down by all religions. "Muslims, Protestants, Catholics, Jews—they're all accepting. It has the imagery and the poetry," she says with an audible sense of amazement. "They're for everybody, and they are so mindful of the human condition. David was such a great warrior, and he would, at times, war with God and say, 'Don't you see what's happening?! They're blaspheming you!' He had such a perception of the infinite, yet he's so human. He's the only one where God said, 'This is a man after my heart.' He's better than a psychic, a psychiatrist, a psychologist. He's guilty of all the same things that we are. So David reflects everything about the human condition, and these Psalms are so relevant, so present."

Both musicians liken cantorial classics such as "Psalm 136"—embellished on *The Psalms* with mandolin, mellotron and Jenni Muldaur's tender vocals—to traditional folk catalog material, with their own sense of aural transmission. When they were selecting material, Colter says Kaye rattled off lines from the Psalms, like, "The Lord is my shepherd," as if he had learned them in Sunday school the previous week. As music scholars and noted American writers, they were both struck by the elegance of King David's words.

"It's a history of Israel—this major symbol in 8-10 sentences," Colter says. "It describes that God said, 'This is my land. This is where I'm gonna live.' It is so rich, and it's poetic."

Colter says she experienced a bit of "supernatural intervention" herself while working on *The Psalms*, when her early copy of the album kept getting stuck in her CD players. "I was forced to listen to it in its slow progression," she says with a laugh. "Lenny kept saying, 'No wine before it's time!' So I was stuck listening to this in different moods, and I thought, 'Isn't this interesting that it draws me to the center of my psyche?' It's mood altering! It takes you to a relation with your spirit, which is a good thing for me. It's a good thing for all of us because I believe we are eternal beings, so it's best to know something about the infinite."

Lauter, who joined *The Psalms* project a few years

Continued on page 77

CUBA 2017: TALES OF A MUSACK MISSIONARY

An award-winning television writer tours a newly opened musical mecca. BY DONICK CARY

I MADE MY WAY TO Cuba with a simple mission—deliver one guitar to a music school there and see what happens.

Eight years ago, I started a musical charity, Musack (musack.org), which provides instruments and supports kids' music programs, after a rash of teen suicides hit my high school on the island of Nantucket. (Today, Musack is making music happen in Nantucket, Los Angeles, Compton, Haiti and Appalachia.) The idea behind Musack was to give kids a voice through music during those shitty teen years when it feels like no one understands you and you are stuck on a foggy island way out at sea—literally or figuratively. We've always taken our mission from the sticker on Woody Guthrie's guitar—"This machine kills fascists"— believing that guitar "machines" can do anything you want them to—kill fascists, make someone love you, share your story, let you be heard, etc. So, when the trip to Cuba came up, it seemed like a no-brainer to take a guitar and find some kids who might need it. Our friends at Horns to Havana (hornstohavana.org), another amazing program, recommended going by Conservatorio Amadeo Roldán.

Cuba is complicated and beautiful—a time warp, a hallucination of a place, like walking through a surrealist painting. There is something about the sea air and the music and the colonial architecture and the cars from the '50s and the politics that all mix into a crazy stew of wonderfully absurd contradictions, all bubbling with rum and symbolism and something new: optimism. I had visited twice before, once in 1992, just after the Soviet Union pulled out and basically left the lights out, and then again in 2000 for the Y2K New Year because if there was one place on the planet that wouldn't shut down with the impending computer crash, it was Cuba. (After all, they didn't even have any computers then.)

Both trips were amazing and eye-opening and brain-expanding. In fact, a visit to Cuba is a little like taking a hallucinogen. The dramatic change in perspective it provides can be that powerful. It reminds you that reality is something we make—that despite the bubbles we construct and live in, we are actually all connected and, at the end of the day, we're supposed to take care of each other. Plus, it's super colorful and crazy to look at—and some of the buildings are literally melting.

Another key to traveling in Cuba and/or tripping is remembering to always "go with the flow." This is very important. You are not going to Club Med. Not everything is going to go the way you think it will. There will be good times and bad times, but if you "go with the flow," you will ultimately be fine, probably have some laughs, maybe actually learn something and probably have your mind blown.

"You are not going to Club Med. Not everything is going to go the way you think it will. There will be good times and bad times, but if you 'go with the flow,' you will ultimately be fine, probably have some laughs, maybe actually learn something and probably have your mind blown."

The way things have evolved in Cuba is like nowhere else on the planet, so nothing happens the way that your brain would predict. They've been in a bubble for years and been forced to improvise for decades, so you have no idea what you will find around any corner: 1950s America, 1980s Russia, 1700s Spain or some mishmash of them all. It's completely unpredictable, so don't even try—just fasten your seat belt and enjoy the ride. The doors to all the chaos and weirdness have been swung wide open to Americans for the first time in decades and, with cheap direct flights from Los Angeles, I couldn't wait to get back.

I packed a guitar, got on a plane and stuck out my tongue for a big tab of Cuba 2017. Four and a half hours later, it all started to kick in. I climbed off the plane and headed to Cuban customs. They looked at the large cardboard box and asked, "*Guittara?*" I said, "*Si*"—the extent of my Spanish class retention—but it did the trick and then—boom—I was time traveling. I found myself in the center of Old Havana, where the colors and light begin to change and the cars all morph into beautiful 1940s and '50s American road monsters, all against the backdrop of a combo of salt-faded Spanish Colonial splendor and Communist-era industrial ruin, like Peter Max meets *Mad Max*. I reminded myself it is super safe here and began to wander the streets. Havana is one of the great cities to wander around, like New York or Paris. You can walk for days and days, and the show never stops.

I stayed in the middle of Old Havana, which buzzes with nonstop activity through the night. Old Havana feels a little bit like a combo of Prague in 1990 mixed with French Quarter New Orleans, but also a thousand other things. I only half-slept—maybe there was too much speed in this dose of Cuba 2017 (or maybe it was just the combo of adrenaline and the strong Cuban coffee that is served at every meal.)

The Cuban people are thrilled to have us and have started to open their apartments for us to crash in. While the hotels, in general, are a bit business-standard (and way overpriced, as they are cashing in on the current high demand), there are a huge variety of perfectly crumbling mansions to rent directly from Cubans. Relying on Airbnb (called Casa Particulares in Cuba) in a country with limited to no internet can be an adventure, but if you go with the flow, you can stay for cheap and meet locals, which is totally worth it. Every single Cuban has a story to tell, so talk to as many people as you can. It's mandatory.

Music is everywhere. It is in the DNA of the island. It's never been outlawed during any of Cuba's iterations, and it is part of the bloodlines and lifelines of every Cuban. The music of Buena Vista Social Club is alive and well. While it has a strong presence on the tourist scene, it is great music nonetheless. The New Orleans vibe comes through with a lot of bars that attract tourists but still feel authentic, and the acts

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are top-notch and legit, playing long into the night. There is a house of music in almost every town, with musicians old and young playing samba, son, salsa and rumba. There is also a vibrant jazz scene, with places like The One-Eyed Cat packed almost every night.

But there is much more going on as well. There's an underground hip-hop scene. There are kids in Metallica T-shirts. The Rolling Stones were just here for a massive free concert that almost everyone seemed to attend. The bubble that Cuba has been trapped in isn't bursting, but it is expanding. New sounds and ideas are creeping in.

On our last full day, we walked through Old Havana with the guitar I brought, en route to the Conservatorio Amadeo Roldán. We had a true Buena Vista Social Club experience of people pointing us around town with various directions and explanations of where to find it. We finally reached the Conservatorio, which is a beautiful, old music school that has been in continual operation since 1903. The 350 kids who study there are incredibly talented and dedicated, and while they are only 30 miles away from Miami, they are in a world completely unlike anything we know. For example, there are no music stores in Cuba. None. That means when a string breaks, it is broken. When a reed breaks, you have to re-glue or carve it—you have to improvise and make do.

We were blown away by the musicianship as we watched a rehearsal with the school director. He introduced us to one of the guitar teachers and treated us to a private mini concert by one of his students. They were bursting with smiles at the brand new Fender guitar that we brought them. They passed it around and all commented on how easy and great it was to play. We discussed how hard it was for them to get instruments—it's not as easy as just shipping stuff to them. The Rolling Stones bought them eight horns when they played their show in Cuba, and the horns had just arrived that week—eight months later—because of paperwork and customs forms and embargo/political nonsense.

We left inspired by these talented, next-gen musicians who need instruments. We came up with the idea of telling all of our friends who go to Cuba to take a guitar or two to these kids. We're calling it Musack Missionaries. If you wish to help, then please contact us. We'll hook you up with some tips on where to go and so forth. You can carry a couple guitars or reeds or whatever, visit some kids—minds blown all around.

As much as traveling in Cuba is like a flashback or a hallucination, it's quite real for the millions of people who live there. Cuba is weird and strange on so many levels, but there is a pervasive hope happening right now—maybe more so than back home. There is a lot of stuff going on right now in Cuba—art and music and people raising their voices to be heard. There is also the joyful sound of kids shouting at the top of their lungs to rock-and-roll of all flavors. *Viva la rock. Viva la revolución.* r

Donick Cary, the co-founder of Musack (and host of the organization's annual Rock and Roll Carnival), is an Emmy-winning writer and producer. After getting his start on Late Night with David Letterman*, he has written for* The Simpsons, Silicon Valley, Parks and Recreation, Bored to Death, New Girl *and many other shows. He also created the animated series* Lil' Bush *and is currently directing the feature documentary* Bad Trip *for Ben Stiller's Red Hour Films.*

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LEGACY

A Collective of Souls

Rich Robinson, Marc Ford and their Black Crowes brethren take another flight as The Magpie Salute. BY BRIAN ROBBINS

They were born in a crossfire hurricane.

Well, not really, but you could say that Superstorm Sandy did have a hand in watering the roots of the musical collective that eventually came to be known as The Magpie Salute back in October of 2012.

The New York warehouse where The Black Crowes stored their gear was one of the many devastated Northeast buildings that Sandy left behind. Much of guitarist Rich Robinson's prized collection of amps and guitars was damaged or destroyed by the storm's surge; a few instruments floated to safety and were used in the recording of Rich's solo album *The Ceaseless Sight*. And a handful of the surviving guitars belonged to his former bandmate, Marc Ford.

Ford, a California-based picker brought on board by The Black Crowes in 1991, first gained mainstream attention when his guitar blasted clear of the mix at the 3:01 mark of "Sting Me"—the opening cut of the Crowes' 1992 release, *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion*. For many, the interplay between Rich and Ford during the following years is the mark of the ultimate Crowes guitar lineup, both in the studio and live.

However, Ford parted ways with the band in 1997—struggling with a drug addiction that eventually landed him in an intensive care unit. "I'd hit rock bottom," says Ford, "and realizing that forced me to take an inventory: 'What's going on here?' It was a difficult situation, but it forced me to do something else."

Embracing a newfound faith and sobriety, Ford woodshedded, bringing his talents back to life. He lent his services to Ben Harper, Blue Floyd, Booker T. Jones, Gov't Mule and, in 2005, he rejoined The Black Crowes when Rich and his brother, lead singer Chris Robinson, reformed the group after a three-year hiatus.

Ford's second term as a Crowe produced more great music (documented on their *Freak 'n' Roll...Into the Fog* live release) but the reunion only lasted until the fall of 2006, when he resigned, feeling that his sobriety would be in jeopardy if he continued with the band.

Regardless of how things had gone down between Ford and the Crowes, Rich still had positive feelings about the music they had made together.

"When it comes to people who get what you're doing musically," Rich says while calling from his home, "Marc was someone I enjoyed playing with. When we played together, it was like having a conversation on a whole different level. To have a musical relationship like that is a gift, you know?"

Fast-forward to the guitars salvaged from the Crowes' flooded warehouse in late 2012. The survivors included an Asher electric (the prototype of what would become the Marc Ford Signature model), a lap steel and a 12-string acoustic. When Rich moved his family from the East Coast to Los Angeles soon after, his gear went with him—along with Ford's guitars.

Rich returned the salvaged guitars to Ford through guitarist Dan Wistrom, a mutual friend who was playing in the younger Robinson's solo band. And when the Robinsons' father passed away

Shervin Lainez

New and old friends: Marc Ford, Matt Slocum, John Hogg, Charity White, Nico Bereciartua, Rich Robinson, Sven Pipien, Katrine Ottosen, Joe Magistro, Adrien Reju (l-r)

later that year, Ford contacted Rich with his condolences.

"We both reached out to one another at different times in really simplistic, cool ways," says Rich.

* * *

WHEN YOU TALK TO RICH Robinson, it's easy to forget the turmoil and conflict that seemed to go hand in hand with the great music that The Black Crowes created over the years.

Rich's voice is peaceful, and his 14-month-old son can be heard over the phone at times—soft coos and burbles as he hangs out in his daddy's arms.

It's certainly a different vibe than the one surrounding the implosion of the Crowes when they officially disbanded in January of 2015. It isn't a secret that the stability of the Crowes over their history was based on the relationship of the Robinson brothers, and a disagreement over business arrangements—according to a statement released by Rich, Chris was pressing for a controlling share of the band—dealt the final blow.

For Rich, the official end of the Crowes provided a certain amount of clarity: He was able to focus on his solo recordings and band. (The Black Crowes' last performance was in December of 2013; they planned to regroup for a tour in 2015 before discussions went south.)

By the time he was ready to tour behind his 2016 solo album, *Flux*, Rich had built a formidable ensemble featuring keyboardist Matt Slocum, former Crowes bassist Sven Pipien, guitarist Nico Bereciartua and longtime collaborator and latter-day Crowes contributor Joe Magistro on drums.

In August 2016, Rich booked a key stop at Applehead Recording in Saugerties, N.Y.—the site of his 2014 *Woodstock Sessions* album, which was recorded before a live studio audience. He scheduled three days of music, with two sessions each day, and began thinking about adding some special guests.

The Magpie Salute during their debut run at New York's Gramercy Theatre

"I wanted Marc there for the same reason that I talked about before: We get what each other is doing and it sounds great, and we're big fans of one another," he says.

Ford, meanwhile, was in the process of putting together a tour with his buddies in The Neptune Blues Club behind a brand new album, *The Vulture*.

His reply when Rich asked him to join in on the Woodstock weekend was simple: "Yeah, let's do this."

Rich wasn't done recruiting though: His next call was to Eddie Harsch, who'd served as the Crowes' keyboardist from 1991 to 2006, at which time he was fired for "personal reasons," according to an official statement. Rich, however, had maintained contact with Eddie since his departure. "I'd call him a couple times a year to check on him and make sure he was OK," he says. "I'd try to get him to play on my records or come out on tour, but he wasn't in the right headspace for that. But when I told him: 'Marc's coming to Woodstock and I want you to come down,' Eddie was like, 'I'm there.'"

They added background singers Adrien Reju and Katrine Ottosen to the lineup for the three-day run and arrived armed with setlists that combined a mix of songs from Rich's solo albums, the Crowes' catalog and some classic covers.

"Having the four of us—Marc, Ed, Sven and me—all in the same room and playing music together was so much fun," says Rich. "And Ed got to be around fans that hadn't seen him for a while. It was great."

Originally, there weren't any plans for the "Rich Robinson & Friends" lineup beyond Woodstock, but the feelings in the room were too strong to deny.

Rich admits, "I started thinking: 'I love the guys in the band I'm in now, and I love all these people, too. Why can't we all just get together and make music? How would we do this? What would it be like?'"

Rich, who was already touring behind the *Flux* album with Magistro, Slocum, Bereciartua and Pipien, reached out to his former guitarist while on the road. Ford wasn't surprised to get the call. "I never believed that we were finished. There was the relationship between Rich and me that was there before the Woodstock sessions and will be there until long after we're gone," he says.

"I knew, deep down, 'this isn't over—it's a force of its own. When we're worthy of it, we can go back to it.'"

The Woodstock players agreed to keep the momentum going, and Rich added two additional voices: John Hogg, a powerful singer who had worked with Rich years earlier in the short-lived Hookah Brown project, and Charity White, who joined the soul and gospel-flavored mini-choir of Reju and Ottosen.

The band officially dubbed themselves The Magpie Salute and announced a run of shows at New York's Gramercy Theatre that almost immediately sold out. Then, just as quickly, the Magpie family was hit with a tragedy when Eddie Harsch died on November 4 while at home in Toronto.

"I used to always think that, of all the people in the Crowes, Ed would be the first to go," says Rich. "I don't know why, but I had that thought in my head. He was 14 years older than me and, with his lifestyle—I don't know. It was still a shock. Seeing the joy Ed got out of playing at Woodstock, and the excitement he was showing about us getting together for the Gramercy run, I would have never guessed that he'd pass before the shows would happen."

> "I used to always think that, of all the people in the Crowes, Ed would be the first to go. I don't know why, but I had that thought in my head."
> **RICH ROBINSON**

The band quickly decided to forge ahead, with Matt Slocum taking on solo keyboard duties.

"There was never any doubt that we would keep going. Ed would want us to," says Rich. "And you weren't going to replace Ed. I knew Matt could handle what needed to be done."

The Gramercy run showcased all the different elements that make up The Magpie Salute. While the sheer number of players onstage could make for a congested mix in a less-talented or more egotistical group, The Magpie Salute proved that they could make powerful music without being *over*powering.

"The very first times we played together, it was like this big wall of sound," says Ford. "But as we went along, all the bits that didn't need to be there started to fall away, and the tones and parts shaped themselves and found where they needed to be—and the band became Magpie."

* * *

THOUGH THE MAGPIE SALUTE are a collective of talents, the friendship between Rich Robinson and Marc Ford is at its heart—a relationship as much discovered as rediscovered, according to Rich. "The more time Marc and I spend together, we realize that years ago my brother Chris had such a huge personality and sometimes it quashed everything else in the room," he says. "Marc and I never really got to hang out and see where we were, except musically. There was always kind of a filter there with Chris. To be able to talk, be this way and see this thing grow has been great, too."

Ford is looking at a busy 2017 with a calendar that's already well packed, between tours scheduled in both the U.S. and Europe for Magpie and The Neptune Blues Club.

When asked if the impending road time is intimidating, considering all he went through years ago, Ford pauses, then answers with confidence: "Getting back together brings up some ugly memories of things that happened, for sure. There are a lot of things that are the same out on the road, although there are things that are absolutely different now as well. Still, it can be a little perilous.

"My wife has a knee-jerk reaction of 'Oh, gosh—Is Marc going to go lose his mind and be a crazy, drug-addled fool, ego maniac again?' But, no. I'm a 50-year-old man who's done it all and I don't like it anymore," he adds. "What I do know about life at this point is that only a few things matter, and you do whatever it takes to keep those things alive. What that usually means is: Shut your mouth and get in the back of the line for a minute."

He laughs heartily, then continues: "Humility comes from being humiliated, you know? Having and losing it once—and realizing it—is humiliation. 'What did I do to blow it? I had something that was so beautiful and lost it—What was my part in it?' That's the healthy way to go. 'Let me fix my part and not worry about other people.' Not laying blame. How great it is that we all got to a place where we could make music together again. I just want to do what it takes so that this can live."

Arnaud Lerondeau

Tom Hines

THE FAR FIELD OF DREAMS

After coming down from a grueling tour behind their 2014 breakthrough album, and some personal hardships, Future Islands press the refresh button and wind up with a warm, honest and refreshingly messy gem.

BY RYAN REED

SAMUEL HERRING VIVIDLY remembers the most crucial audience of Future Islands' career. And no, it wasn't the crowd at *The Late Show*, where the synth-pop trio inadvertently created a viral frenzy with their enigmatic performance of "Seasons (Waiting on You)." In an inconspicuous, pizza-slinging venue in Olympia, Wash.—one of roughly 300 dates on their expansive promotional tour for 2014's *Singles*—the singer gazed stage-left and caught a glimpse of some unexpected fans. "In the front row, there was an 80-year-old woman in a wheelchair with her husband," he says. "They were standing next to these three 15- or 16-year-old girls. Everybody just had the biggest smiles on their faces. Then, beside them, closer to the middle, was a middle-aged couple.

"To see that, it was like, 'The truth of what we're doing is coming though,'" Herring continues. "If we're reaching across generationally, this is a good thing. It's not a weird thing, like, 'Oh, no—the grannies are coming to the shows.' It's like, 'If we're reaching this woman with our music, this is great.' I wish my grandmother could be here to see this. We just wanna reach people with our music—give something for people to dance to or cry to."

Singles, the North Carolina-bred, Baltimore-based band's fourth album, brought "exponential growth": higher spots on the charts, more radio exposure and sold-out crowds at more prestigious venues. After eight years of surviving a fickle music industry through dogged determination (and sweaty stage-dancing), Future Islands now faced a more difficult task: hurdling their own high bar. "We worked so hard to get people's attention, and now we have their attention, so it's like, 'You better make something of this,'" Herring says.

"In 2015, getting off the road, I thought, 'I've reached the goal I set out for myself at 23,' which was to be a working musician who only had to worry about my art," he continues. "If I wasn't on the road, then I just had to create. That was my job. And reaching that goal was wonderful but, at the same time, it was time to reset. You need a new goal. You need something else to work toward to push yourself forward."

Herring felt the stress of maintaining that momentum, which was exacerbated by the band's draining, 22-month *Singles* trek. It's a vicious cycle: With more people listening, they capitalized by booking every show they could, but that endless grind wore them down psychologically. Show after show, the group—Herring, bassist/guitarist William Cashion and keyboardist Gerrit Welmers—delivered their trademark live catharsis, best exemplified by that now-classic *Letterman* performance.

In hindsight, that TV spot was destined to become a meme: With late-night hosts salivating for clickable content, Herring offered a perfect jaw-dropping vehicle for future laptop viewings. It was a tour-de-force of silliness and poignancy. Backed by his stoic bandmates, the frontman unleashed a stream of classic stage hits like the Chuck Berry duck walk, the chest pound, the Shakespearian hand gesture, the "sun in your eyes" squint and the electric slide—all while morphing his vocals from theatrical croon to death-metal bellow.

* * *

AFTER WRAPPING THE *SINGLES* tour in December 2015, Future Islands took a month off before regrouping in their home state of North Carolina at a beach house in the small town of Avon. There, during a weeklong writing retreat, they began their usual process: Cashion and Welmers jammed to a drum machine, as Herring scribbled lyric ideas in the corner. The process was productive at first: They wrote a song a day, including the propulsive "Ran," the eventual lead single for their next LP, *The Far Field*. But the singer remained nervous, observing a breakdown in communication. "We thought, 'Do we know how to do this still? Will we write another good song again?'" Herring says. "We traveled all over the world in 2014 and 2015. And we were right beside each other the whole time, but you get to the point where you're right next to each other and you're best friends, but you're not really communicating with each other."

The trio continued to write over the spring and summer, inching closer to a full track list of new material. But they struggled to find a physical space conducive to creativity. Inconvenienced by the downtown construction plaguing Baltimore, they relocated to a cave-like practice room, with "no windows and black carpet on the walls for insulation." Finally, they landed in Cashion's studio space, a brighter environment with windows and bright lights. "I don't know how much that affected what we were writing, but I'm certain it affected our mood in general," Herring says. "I get a lot of credit for being an open and emotional lyricist and singer, but all of that comes from the music. The music is first. And the guys are very emotional writers in what they're pulling from."

Cashion and Welmers amassed enough grooves and soundscapes for multiple albums, but issues in Herring's personal life—including the collapse of a long-distance relationship—became a distraction. Around May, the anxiety of finishing his lyrics threatened to derail their progress. "I got stressed out," he says. "I had too many instrumentals, too many open songs where I hadn't gotten to the end yet. I was kind of worried about where we were at with the album. We only had about five or six songs that I felt were album-worthy tracks. I had seven or eight instrumentals that were really good, and I'd started five of them with a first verse or a chorus. But I didn't know where to turn. I was like, 'Which song do I work on at this time?' I was kinda losing my mind with it. I'd freak out to the guys, like, 'What the hell are we doing?'"

But Herring crossed a pivotal turning point during a road trip to visit his older brother in Asheville, N.C. During the eight-hour drive from Baltimore, zooming through the Blue Ridge Mountains, the singer cleared his head by perusing old instrumentals—and, suddenly, he flipped a mental switch, crafting the atmospheric words for ballad "Black Rose." "By the time I got to Asheville the next day, I had a finished demo," he says. "In that time, it went from five or six good songs to eight or nine good songs. Then, the pressure went off."

The band workshopped 15 new songs with renewed confidence during a trio of opening gigs in North Carolina. But to alleviate the tension, they performed under fake monikers: The Hidden Haven, named after an earlier beach rental; This Old House, a nod to the titular home improvement series, which Herring watched when he was growing up; and Chirping Bush, which was inspired by one of Welmers' disturbing dreams. ("It was about a bunch of birds who couldn't get out of a bush," Herring says with a laugh. "The bush was chirping!")

"We would just roll into town, show up and people would be like, 'Hey, Future Islands—what are you doing here?'" Herring recalls. "In the old days, we would just write songs in between tours, take them on the road and actually live-test songs. We'd write a song on a Thursday, then go out on tour and start playing a song live on a Saturday. Maybe the lyrics wouldn't be fully written, and I'd be improvising the second verse or chorus. This was our process back when we started—when we were in college, playing house parties at 18 years old. We're much more at home onstage than in a studio, and we know how much a song can change over time when you play it live. It just gets better and better. You find

"In 2015, getting off the road, I thought, 'I've reached the goal I set out for myself at 23,' which was to be a working musician who only had to worry about my art," Herring, pictured with Future Islands three years ago, says of his band's 2014 crossover.

more of the emotional highs in the song, how to tell the story the best way possible—especially through my performance and the physicality of telling a story."

After emailing a handful of potential producers, the band linked up with John Congleton at the famed Sunset Sound studios in Los Angeles. Together, encouraged by their new collaborator, they developed a routine: trekking a mile and a half to the studio every morning ("We looked ridiculous with our big book bags, like high-school kids walking to school"), recording, eating lunch, going home by 6 p.m., then unwinding without musical decisions to distract them.

Even though *Singles* transformed Future Islands' career, Herring feels that the LP is "much more clinical than [the band's] early records" and that both the album's production and their performances lack a distinctive warmth. With Congleton, Herring hoped they could recapture the "rawness and messiness" of albums like 2010's *In Evening Air* and the following year's *On the Water*.

"*Singles* was also our first time in the studio and being high-fidelity," he says. "This was the first time we weren't recording an album in the living room of a house. But because of those living room environments and learning on the fly, there are certain beauties about the early records that I missed. Something John said that stuck with me was: 'Producers and musicians want things to be so perfect that they take all the magic out of their records. They'll make everything the way it's supposed to be, and the music completely loses its spirit.' I completely agree with that. I Trusted John with our weird ideas."

* * *

WHILE LESS POLISHED THAN their previous album, *The Far Field* is similarly focused: exploding with pop choruses ("Ran," "Time on Her Side") and defined by the interplay of Welmers' sleek synth pads and Cashion's throbbing, Peter Hook-styled bass. And while Herring often writes in romantic analogies (shifting seasons, glowing moons, shining suns), his new words speak plain, soul-baring truths about physical and emotional distance. The album's centerpiece is "North Star," a tropical-tinged anthem about a brutal snowstorm that nearly—just nearly—keeps the singer from visiting his then-girlfriend.

He also expands his vocal repertoire at every turn: dialing back the scratchiness to reveal a more tender tone, layering thick harmonies. (He developed the latter technique after experimenting on a holiday cover of Wham!'s "Last Christmas.") Herring's voice has always been the band's most dynamic and divisive instrument—but here, it projects an unexpected confidence and clarity.

"I try not to call myself a singer so nobody can call me out for it: 'You're a terrible singer!'" he says. "I still feel strongest as a writer and performer. Really, *Singles* taught me a lot about my voice. For some of the problems I have with that album, there's a lot of stuff I couldn't have written without [producer] Chris Coady's touch. My vocals are so clear, and that made me appreciate my voice for the first time in a long time. It made me think, 'Oh, I can sing!'

"Between *Singles* and *The Far Field*, there were more than 300 shows," he continues. "That really takes a toll on the voice.

> "If I wasn't on the road, then I just had to create. That was my job. And reaching that goal was wonderful but, at the same time, it was time to reset. You need a new goal. You need something else to work toward to push yourself forward."
> **SAMUEL HERRING**

Going into this album, I was fearful, wondering if I could still do the things I used to do. You quickly learn to turn any disadvantage into an opportunity to explore your voice more. Really, I'm a singer because I have to be. Maybe when I'm, like, 70, I'll call myself a singer."

Herring may not consider himself a pure vocalist, but that's just modesty talking. He's one of modern pop's most commanding presences: Hearing (and watching) him perform, it's impossible not to feel *something*, whether you're weeping, laughing or simply staring with your jaw on the floor. With *The Far Field*, Future Islands prove that their breakout magic wasn't a fluke. They've touched a nerve.

"We felt successful before Letterman and *Singles* and all that—that just pushed it further," Herring says. "It never felt like we pulled the wool over somebody's eyes. Because we put in the work—we're all from hard-working Southern families. If I'm gonna make a dollar, then I'd rather sweat for it than sit down. That's what we do. It feels good that we've earned something together."

THE MUSIC NEVER STOPPED

Dead & Company return for a third go-round of their ongoing evolution

BY DEAN BUDNICK
PHOTO BY DANNY CLINCH

JOHN MAYER HASN'T SEEN THE new Grateful Dead documentary just yet, but he knows exactly when he intends to carve out the requisite four hours needed for a screening of *Long Strange Trip*.

"After I get off my tour in May, I'm going to reset and watch it as a primer to get into that space again," he explains. "I would imagine that at the end of watching that movie, even if I wasn't able to play with those guys, I'd go, 'Oh God, I would love to be in that band.' And that really is where it started for me."

It was back in 2011 when serendipity and a playlist algorithm converged, leading the sweet sounds of "Althea" to reach Mayer's ears through the Neil Young Pandora channel.

"When you're listening to music on Pandora, there's this inherent sense of 'these are all songs you know but forgot that you wanted to hear.' Then 'Althea' came on, and everything just seemed to stop. I went, 'What is that?' because, as a guitar player, I had managed to burrow pretty deep into all the things that can happen on a guitar neck. Guitar players get to a point where they're deep enough into their instrument where they can visualize what someone's playing. Especially if I'm falling asleep and listening to music, I can watch the fretboard and map it. But I listened to this, and it was like I had never played an instrument. It inspired this perfect jealousy in me. There's a certain kind of jealousy an artist can have that's all positive jealousy—'I want to be responsible for creating something like that.'"

And, four years later, he would be.

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IN MID-JANUARY 2015, THE CORE FOUR SURVIVING MEMBERS of the Grateful Dead announced that they would reunite to celebrate the band's 50th anniversary. Mickey Hart, Bill Kreutzmann, Phil Lesh and Bob Weir revealed that they would return to the stage together, along with Trey Anastasio, Jeff Chimenti and Bruce Hornsby for three Fare Thee Well shows at Chicago's Soldier Field—the site where the Grateful Dead performed their final gig on July 9, 1995. (They added two Fare Thee Well dates in Santa Clara, Calif., after the initial announcement.)

Dead & Company: Mickey Hart, Jeff Chimenti, Bill Kreutzmann, Bob Weir, Oteil Burbridge, John Mayer (l-r)

While the four Grateful Dead musicians had played together in a number of incarnations since Jerry Garcia's passing in 1995, they had not done so since their July 4, 2009 appearance at Michigan's Rothbury Music Festival. Over the intervening years, Lesh and Weir toured with their Furthur project, while Hart and Kreutzmann appeared together in the Rhythm Devils, rendering many fans apprehensive as to whether their collective musical paths would ever converge again.

Around the time of this announcement, Mayer was at Capitol Studios working on an album. Don Was, who had co-produced Mayer's two previous records and was aware of his status as a newly consecrated Deadhead, invited him to attend a meeting in Capitol Tower with Hart and Weir. It was there, during Mayer's first direct encounter with the pair, that he pledged his fealty to their music.

A couple of weeks later Mayer was given an opportunity to serve as a guest host on *The Late Late Show*, during the interregnum between Craig Ferguson and James Corden. He invited Weir to join him for a performance, in which they teamed up on versions of "Truckin'" and an altogether apt "Althea."

Their first musical exchange took place during soundcheck. As Weir recalls, "We had decided, more or less, which tunes we were going to do. So we rehearsed them but, two hours later, we were still playing. We had run the tunes and were still going at it. They finally just told us we were done and unplugged us."

The musical connection was undeniable, leaving Weir to conclude that "the whole thing seemed like too much fun to run away from."

While Lesh was no longer willing to commit himself to a steady road regimen at this point in his life, Weir was game. Hart and Kreutzmann signed on as well, with Mayer's overarching enthusiasm holding sway.

"We weren't looking for John," Hart explains. "John came to us so impassioned that we couldn't turn him down. It would be stupid. So we tried it out, and it worked from the get-go. He is really, really good—he's fast and he's confident. He came into this band knowing that it would be a great challenge, but he felt good about being a part of us. And we felt good about turning this solo artist into a groupist. So now he's a groupist, and he really loves it too. There's something you have to give up when you become a groupist. He's normally a bandleader himself but, in this band, there are a lot of leaders. He has our sensibilities and he doesn't have any of the pop-music trappings, as it were. We felt really good about him being a part of us, it was a very natural place."

So in March 2015, before entering full-on Fare Thee Well mode, Hart, Kreutzmann and Weir spent a few days at a Bay Area rehearsal space looking to complete their lineup. The keyboard slot soon fell to Jeff Chimenti, who first joined Weir in RatDog back in 1997 as a Dead neophyte in his own right and has since appeared with him in The Other Ones, The Dead, Furthur and Fare Thee Well. Phish's Mike Gordon was an initial option on bass; however, as he told *Relix* last year, he decided to step back "because what I want to be doing with my time at 50 is writing and recording, and the Dead tour didn't leave enough time for it. I hope I get to play with all of those guys again—and I hope they aren't mad at me—because I have so much respect for them."

> "We weren't looking for John. John came to us so impassioned that we couldn't turn him down. It would be stupid."
> **MICKEY HART**

Weir affirms that there are no hard feelings. He's quite content that they were able to land Oteil Burbridge, fresh off of his 17-year stint in the Allman Brothers Band, who had some limited exposure to the Dead catalog, through his work in the Bill Kretuzmann Trio.

"Mike gave it a shot and it worked out pretty well," Weir offers, "but then he decided he had too much on his plate, so we kept looking and we ended up with Oteil. And I'm glad that happened because Oteil is just a different style of bass player, so we can take the songs places that they don't particularly go when we have a lead instrumentalist on the bass. It showcases the songs a little more and showcases the playing a little less."

The Dead & Company name came courtesy of Mayer. "There are only so many iterations of Dead," he explains. "I brought it up and it seemed right because it lives just between *new* and *of course*."

The name stuck, even following a freewheeling group chat in which Hart, Kreutzmann and Weir spitballed some alternatives. "There were some incredibly wild suggestions," Mayer remembers. "I'm a big fan of wild brainstorm sessions, but this is something wilder than I've ever seen. It was hilarious. But whatever name we were going to choose would have to be validated by the music. We could have called ourselves anything and, if the music was right, then the phonetics of whatever words we selected was going to sound right."

* * *

IN AUGUST 2015, DEAD & Company announced a fall tour. Following the revitalizing vibe and collective catharsis of the Fare Thee Well shows, Mayer's involvement (which had been rumored ever since the spring) was met with both optimism and skepticism.

Mayer was aware that some fans were leery of his participation but, to his mind, on some level, this was nothing new.

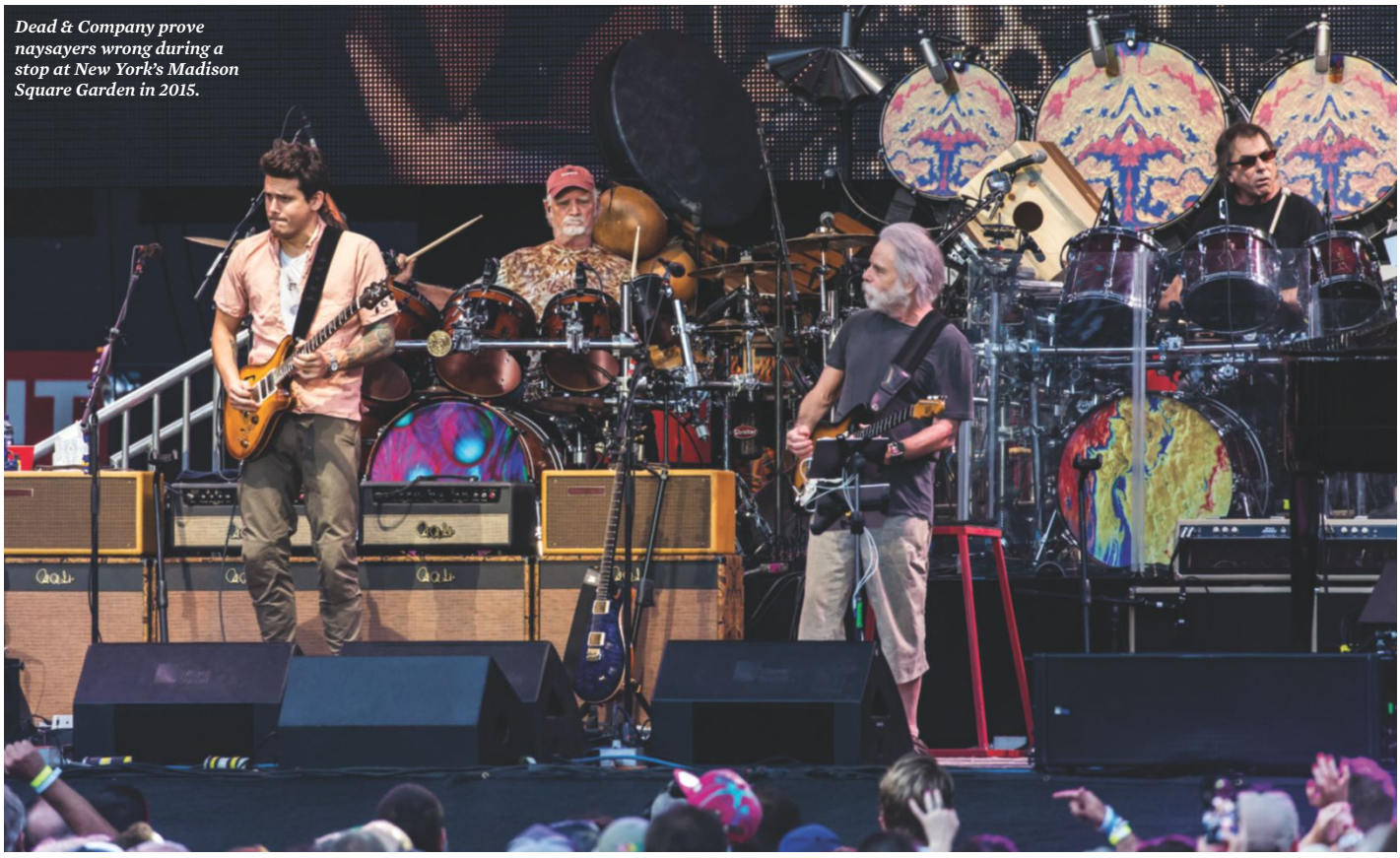
"When I was 16 years old, I would play these open-mic blues nights," he remembers. "My friend's dad would drive me to these clubs because he was the bass player. I would show up and everybody would be like, 'Who's the kid?' I always knew I could answer 'Who's the kid?' by the time I got offstage when they'd heard me play the music as best and as deeply as I could. Then, when I was 20 years old in Atlanta [after leaving Berklee College of Music], I entered an open-mic night, where it was all those older people wondering, 'What's going on here?' I've never entered a room and people went, 'I can't wait for this. Who are you, strange boy? You're probably great.' It's always been this grumble.

"I've been so weaned on people cranking their necks back and going, 'What's this going to be?' that I wasn't disappointed by the skepticism. I thought it was a healthy response. It would be insulting to the fans of this music to assume that they were going to very easily plug this dichotomous thing together and immediately decide, 'Oh, yeah, it's going to be great.'"

What many Deadheads did not understand is that Mayer treasures the Grateful Dead in the same way that they do.

"I listen to this music every day," he explains. "I listen to it in the car wherever I go. It's playing like nature sounds, the way you would hear a babbling brook. Grateful Dead music has a whole extra dimension for me than listening to music. There's books, movies, theater, music, art, comedy, Grateful Dead. It's a completely different lobe of my brain than music. I listen to this music to clear my head of music."

"I see this canon of music as a city," he adds in characterizing the scope of the band's catalog. "If you put every Grateful Dead song together, it's probably 12-square miles large and fully animated. You have 'Brown-Eyed Women' happening in this bar and, in back of that bar, later on tonight is 'It Must Have



Dead & Company prove naysayers wrong during a stop at New York's Madison Square Garden in 2015.

Bill Kelly

Been the Roses.' 'Truckin'' is on the highway and 'Goin' Down the Road Feeling Bad' is on that highway, but on Sunday. You can just keep going and laying it in."

He shares a few additional signature traits with the Deadhead community beyond this: As a teenager growing up in Connecticut, he made the pilgrimage to New York's Wetlands Preserve and other clubs in the mid-'90s to record Charlie Hunter and Medeski Martin & Wood.

"They called it acid jazz, and I didn't quite know what the acid part meant because I wasn't quite indoctrinated into the other stuff," Mayer says of his taper days. "I remember seeing Charlie Hunter at Wetlands—it must have been Charlie Hunter Quartet when Calder Spanier was still around, and he was the saxophone player. [Spanier died in a 1997 auto accident.] I saw Charlie Hunter at the Middle East in Cambridge and brought this guitar pedal that he uses and had him sign it.

"I also had a DAT recorder with the external battery pack and this little lunch cooler that I used as my taper rig. I saw Charlie Hunter at South Street Seaport and I had the DAT for years. I learned all this playing off this one concert, and I learned to play like him as much as I could from all these DAT tapes that I made. After I went to the Berklee College of Music, though, I didn't keep it going."

Nonetheless, Mayer's formative musical experiences in the improvisational realm were much broader than many Deadheads associated with him before seeing him in action. Indeed, before his first show with Dead & Company, many assumed that the group would gravitate back to the blues palette of the band's early days when Pigpen exerted his influence. However, while Mayer is adept at such tones and techniques, he wanted to go the whole nine yards—or, rather, the full 12 miles.

"When I started, I looked at it from a completely technical standpoint. 'Could I make this music happen?'" Mayer reflects. "There's no reason to assume that anybody would know that I could, and I never held it against them. I feel that the steadfastness with which they protect the gate is the same loyalty once you're in. It's like the movie where there's a bunch of seemingly scary biker guys, and a scrawny business guy endears himself to them in some way and they give him a jacket. If you do the work, if you can fix the guy's motorcycle, you can get his jacket. If you compare my music to the Grateful Dead and that's personified, then I'm the scrawny business guy in there. But I'm relishing the opportunity to do the work."

* * *

THE ESSENCE OF THE GRATEFUL Dead experience is bifurcated. One side is that rich catalog of material. During the 1980s and 1990s, the mainstream media often questioned the vitality of their compositions. Most of these reports focused on the lot scene—in which every male Deadhead interviewed for a daily newspaper seemingly identified himself as "Jack Straw"—along with some dismissive remarks about improvisational excess. However, over the past 10 years, there has been a dramatic shift in critical reception, as official releases, a SiriusXM station and the band members' ongoing efforts have framed the group's work with new lenses. Outside projects such as the *Day of the Dead* tribute album have all served to affirm the vitality of the music, which always was at the core of it all.

Weir observes in this context: "People are starting to look at the songs the way that we have all along. Either we were ahead of our time or way behind our time—a bit one way or another. But it looks like it's finally catching up. So now we have Dead & Company to reinvestigate those songs and see where they want to go."

The material continues to evolve and reveal itself because the other essential side of the group is its experimental, exploratory ethos, which requires the band members to walk the collective fine line between being right and tight and liberated and loose. This is encapsulated by the

Mayer and Kreutzmann ride the Dead's "rhythm snake" during an intimate show at San Francisco's Fillmore in 2016.

Stuart Levine

way that Mickey Hart and Bill Kreutzmann describe their performance style: Hart often refers to it as drumming without drumming, while Kreuztmann makes the point that, for him, drumming is not about keeping time.

The challenge and the glory of it all is that Dead & Company offers both a continuation and a new jumping-off point. Weir reinforces this as he notes, "Mickey and Bill and I go back a ways and Jeff and I go back a ways, but when you put the whole ensemble together, it's a new band—it's a new outfit."

In comparing the group to Furthur, Weir suggests, "There's a great deal of difference in the focus of the presentation. With Dead & Company, the focus is more on the songs and, with Furthur, it's more on the playing. With Furthur, we started off a couple miles down the road from where the Dead left off because Phil and I both had a lot of miles under our shoes since the Dead played, and we brought that with us and we readily understood each other with that. We were ready to move on, whereas, with Dead & Company, we started close to where the Dead left off."

So he instructed Burbridge to learn the last iteration of the songs performed by the Grateful Dead, focusing on 1992–1995. "In order for Dead & Company to make those tunes their own, it's best that we go back to the original well," Weir explains. "I envision this going on for some time, and the songs will continue to grow and evolve with new aspects and all that kind of stuff."

Some of his intention is manifested in the mechanics of creating a setlist. At present, the band drafts it in advance; however, Weir aspires to return to the era in which, "typically, what we'd do was Jerry and I would figure out whose tune we were going to start with, and then we'd pick the first couple tunes of a given set and what we were going to close with. That was the extent of our set writing because everybody knew the tunes, so we could pull up whatever seemed appropriate at the time. And then, in the second set, we would do the same thing—just write the first couple of tunes and, oftentimes, we wouldn't even get so far as to what we were going to close with. At that point, we'd just take it from go.

"Dead & Company is not quite there yet to where we can start relaxing and just working off memory and seeing what feels appropriate at any given point. But I'd be surprised if Dead & Company isn't ready to do that soon."

As for what happens in the moment, "Time is what you make it," Hart explains. "You can think of the Grateful Dead as a rhythm snake: We expand, we contract, we go faster, we go slower. We're constantly updating the groove to find the best possible feeling because that's what we're chasing. We've been chasing the feeling all our lives, and sometimes we catch up with it, and then we do our business in that groove. But it's not necessarily linear; it's not a straight furrow. It moves and it breathes, it expands or contracts—faster, slower, louder, quiet. It's dynamic. It's also a series of conversations. Bill and I have been having a conversation for 50 years, so what you bring to the table is really important because there needs to be two in a conversation. Whether it be with Bob, with Bill, or with John or Oteil or Jeff, there are all kinds of conversations going within the rhythmic structure of a band. Sometimes, of course, it goes into chaos, which is the way it's supposed to. Chaos-order, order-chaos.

"The physiology of this whole thing is that Bill and I are driving the train along with the guitarists and everybody else. First, the conversation is with me and Bill. Then, we're reaching out to both Bob and John, mediating the tempos and interacting with where they go—and they interact with where we go. In this band, you really have to listen because people are doing cool things all the time, and you want to pick up on the coolest of them. Then, I have a conversation with Bob, and Bill has a conversation with Bob, and then we're there with John *and* Bob, and we try to set the record straight exactly where we want it to be. Once it's there, then we just fly. The idea is coming to the place that we all agree is cool. It works, it feels great and everybody's smiling. Then, you know you're in the groove and you can do your business. That's where you do the big business."

Hart continues, "I'm in contact with Jeff because he's on my side of the stage, and we talk all night.And then with Oteil—I stand on a vibrating piece of wood that has these motors on it, and I have Oteil coming through my feet. I can feel him coming up my pant legs. So I'm locked to him not just through my ears, but through my whole skeletal apparatus being vibrated. Same with Bill. I have Bill coming up—all the low end, the bass drum and all the stuff. I'm not hearing it, I'm *feeling* it as well. So, that really grounds you because you can hear and feel exactly what's happening while this organism is being formed right in front of you. A band is just like an anthill: It swarms. That's the goal: to get all together for one purpose, not individually, not thinking about you. It's not you; it's *us*."

* * *

MAYER'S FORTUITOUS "ALTHEA" encounter was by no means inevitable. When one is on a particular Pandora station, suggestions are generated not only through musical compatibility but also by a demographic component. In Mayer's case, Neil Young is a generational peer of the Grateful Dead, which provides a nexus beyond the connective tissue of their song catalogs.

However, if one is listening to contemporary folk on the service, this will not necessarily lead to the complementary sounds of the genre's iconic forbearers. Speaking from personal experience driving in the car with my teenage daughter's Pandora app providing the soundtrack to our travels, we'll often hear multiple songs by The Milk Carton Kids but nary a selection from Simon & Garfunkel. So too, Pandora steers us away from *Workingman's Dead* or the all-acoustic *Reckoning*.

Mayer, who will turn 40 this fall, acknowledges, "Most of the time, it takes somebody to do something again for the new generation to find it. As an aging musician, you have to accept that there are better iterations of a design that still exist but that aren't as popular as the current derivative version of it. But people want to participate in real-time with the artist. They want to know that the song they hear was written in the same air they breathe."

To be clear, Mayer, is not referencing The Milk Carton Kids here, just the mechanism by which younger ears receive music.

"That's just the way it is," he continues, "and I have to imagine that, one day, when I have kids, my kid is going to run in the room and go, 'Listen to this song.' And I'm going to say, 'You know that song is just like this other song but not as good. Let me play you this other song.' And they'll go, 'No, not interested.' There's a certain modernity to it, where it doesn't feel like it's happening in their universe."

When asked whether this perspective informs a certain missionary zeal that he brings to Dead & Company, Mayer responds, "Absolutely. That's my nesting place in this. I think if I wasn't looking at it that way, I'd be milling around inside this thing, trying to find a place to stand comfortably. The way that I have found to stand comfortably in this is I am helping to keep the portal open. I think that's what people have responded to."

"I get a lot of people's feelings told to me about this music," he adds. "They tell me how many times they saw the Dead and, then, they'll talk about how this band makes them feel. And every time someone comes up to me and wants to talk about the Grateful Dead or Dead & Company, I just go into the most placid, satisfied, comfortable zone because it's almost like somebody talking to me from a rotary club in some other state—'Oh, we're both in the rotary club.'

"But when they're talking to me, they're talking to one representative of this larger thing; they're not talking to the guy who does it. My strengths as a musician are only coming into play as an assistant to the entire thing. For the first time in my life, it's not about me doing the best this or the best that. I'm there as a brace that helps keep this thing open, so that people can get where they want to go. They're not even really making eye contact with what I'm doing or with me. I'm there so that they can make eye contact with what they want to see that's above all of us.

"They wish it was a different way," Mayer adds. "We all wish it was a different way. We all wish it was the Grateful Dead, but what I think people have figured out is that, in many ways, you can still make it to that destination. You can still make it home."

* * *

IN LATE MAY, DEAD & COMPANY will begin their third round of "transportation work": moving minds and elevating spirits. Their summer 2016 tour built on the momentum of their fall 2015 debut.

From Hart's position on the drum riser, "I look out and the people are the same age. We're getting older, and they're still in their 20s and 30s. It flipped generations somehow; the music was passed on to another generation, and yet again, to another. A very unusual situation happened here where the music was vital, for many decades, and that's because the brother passed it on to the sister, to the son and the daughter, and it became a good thing to do together as a family as well. That's the power in being able to feel confident with your audience—that they're really there for you."

Weir has indicated a willingness to enter the studio with the group to record a mix of chestnuts and new originals, but there are no immediate plans. "I would like to do that with this band," he affirms, "but right now, everybody has a bunch of commitments."

Meanwhile, Burbridge explains that in his free time, "I like to check out as many different decades of the same song as I can for my own pleasure—just to see how Phil changed his approach, how the whole band in general changed their approach, how it all evolved over time. It's amazing to see the different ways they approached the same song and I learn something from each one. So that's really fun for me. It's one of those things where you could look at it like it's a lot of work, or you could just look at it like this enormous buffet where you have 10 different takes on bread pudding and

> "I see this canon of music as a city. If you put every Grateful Dead song together, it's probably 12-square miles large and fully animated."
> **JOHN MAYER**

10 different takes on spaghetti and meat sauce, and you can't do it all in one sitting. So the next day, you go back and try a different one."

Mayer observes, "What Oteil brings is a sense of syncopation that really modernizes the band. He also brings the ability to respect the song but be himself. He and I being admitted latecomers gives us the perspective of having a lot of other influences by the time we got here, and the balancing act is: How do we represent our influences and how do we shape this music that's been created over these many years? That's an ongoing process. On the '15 tour, I was taking a bluesier approach to it and Oteil was taking a thunderous approach to the bass. Then, on the '16 tour, I remember having a discussion with Bob and Oteil, where he would bring the bass up to a bit more of the guitar register and I would bring the guitar a little further away from minor pentatonic blues into a more melodic thing. Bob and I have talked about this summer being the study of patience. When I listen to '77 Grateful Dead, and Jerry is playing this incredibly slow-thinking, mellow Zen guitar—it's brilliant. It reaches this other level."

"We're still learning each other's moves," Weir suggests. "The music we play requires a lot of intense listening and a lot of experiencing it together. We've learned to play as a band and, the more we play, the better we get at. It is a work in progress, but we're coming along."

"When we first started with Dead & Company," Mayer reveals, "I really wanted to get to a point where we could use the Stealie on a T-shirt. I thought it would be like being embraced if people could accept that the Stealie also meant Dead & Company. I have to reveal some total selfishness in that—'Oh, my God, I want to be in this thing where we get to use the Stealie!' But Bob, to his wisdom and credit, said, 'Let's earn that.' Then, by the time we went out on the summer tour I looked at the Dead & Company logo, and because of the way that we had played and because of the experiences that we had, I went, 'No, *that's* us. *We* did that.' I think it's a great testament to what Bob and Billy and Mickey put together to keep this spirit alive that by the time I was finally asked, 'Do you want to put a Stealie on a shirt?' it didn't matter to me anymore because I realized we're Dead & Company now."

REVIEWS

Compiled by MIKE GREENHAUS

The String Cheese Incident

THE STRING CHEESE INCIDENT

Believe SCI FIDELITY

The String Cheese Incident has long been a populist musical force. They bring something for everyone, whether you like bluegrass, pop-rock, funk, folk or any other style with an improvisational backbone. The Colorado band's colorful shows replace any genre classification with pure, electrifying energy—they could tackle a Black Sabbath dirge and still make it feel like sunshine. Thankfully, SCI has never been plagued by a wildly unbalanced embrace of studio albums versus live shows; you won't find too many haters of 2003's *Untying the Not* or their 1996 debut *Born on the Wrong Planet*.

That said, Cheese's seventh studio album, *Believe*, is an enjoyable nine-song collection that struggles to truly achieve liftoff. *Believe* arrives three years after the bright, organic *Song in My Head*—which was released after a nine-year absence from the studio. About *Believe*, mandolinist **Michael Kang** has said, "It's about time we put as much energy into the recording as we do [our] live performances." It's a perfectly admirable goal, but *Believe* finds the band overstuffing songs that need to breathe.

The album does include some stunning tunes, though. The easily strummed "My One and Only" is a clear, starry night sky, with gorgeous vocals from Elephant Revival's **Bonnie Paine**. The song gently moves through lovely visuals—"The river's a highway outstretched ahead, rumbling and tossing along its great bed. I'm riding the currents, wherever I'm led"—before kicking up a flurry of strings and fluttering percussion. "Down a River" is similarly affecting, a slow-rippling folk tune with beautiful mandolin and guitar interplay.

SCI successfully turn things up, too—the funky, earthy groove of "Sweet Spot" feels like clouds breaking to reveal a perfectly sunny day, with a purely self-referential chorus: "It's a catchy little number goin' 'round in my head."

Those organic, Colorado mountain vibes are replaced in the album's back half by less inspired, airtight dance-rock tunes. It's easy to imagine the pop-rap of "Stop Drop Roll" as a neon-glowing jam in concert; on *Believe*, it creeps too close to the radio funk of Maroon 5. The called-out chorus and chugging guitars of "So Much Fun" recall Journey. "Beautiful," the album's last song, devolves into a full-on electro-bass assault that would sound at home on a Skrillex banger.

SCI's latest may not rally new believers—but these improv masters aren't going anywhere. *Justin Jacobs*

Scott McCormick

Ray Davies

Americana LEGACY

It's been almost a decade since **Ray Davies** introduced a new set of songs to the world, but he's hardly been slacking. After 2007's *Working Man's Café*, he assembled the fun (if unnecessary) *Kinks Choral Collection*; dropped the collaborative retrospective *See My Friends* with Bruce Springsteen, Metallica and more; published his memoir, *Americana: The Kinks, the Riff, the Road: The Story*; and performed steadily. But Kinks fans, this writer included, couldn't help but thirst for some new material instead of reimaginings of past hits. With the *Americana* album, Davies has finally returned to his truest strength: original songwriting. While it's not a revolutionary record, its quality is a testament to an icon already 54 years into his career. *Americana* features **The Jayhawks** as Davies' backing band, and they match the feeling of each song expertly. The lazy, shuffling "I've Heard That Beat Before" is loose and easy—you'll want to crack some peanuts and order a beer. First single "Poetry" rocks just hard enough, with bright, punchy guitars that never overpower Davies' storytelling. The album draws on Davies' memoir as inspiration, even featuring some spoken-word excerpts that harken back to the British author's own American history: "The day before I left New Orleans, my neighbor from down the street, Alex Chilton, came to say goodbye."At its core, *Americana* is a warm, easy to enjoy, country-flecked rock record with a few truly excellent tunes (the gently soaring "Rock 'N' Roll Cowboys," the fiery, honky-tonk "The Mystery Room"), crafted by a rock star who is still hungry—impressively so—to prove that he's a legend. ***Justin Jacobs***

Craig Finn

We All Want the Same Things

PARTISAN

Whether fronting his hard-rocking band The Hold Steady or out on his own, **Craig Finn** pens empathetic and funny short stories about down-and-out losers, hard-up hoodrats, and sketchy minor criminals. His third solo album, *We All Want the Same Things*, finds his characters in positions that will feel familiar to longtime listeners—worst-case scenarios, wrecked sadness, faithful dejection—but this long player is Finn's sweetest, most satisfying solo outing yet. Teaming, once again, with producer **Josh Kaufman**, who reached a new legion of fans last year, thanks to his work on *Day of the Dead* and Bob Weir's *Blue Mountain*, the album's feel is balmy and spontaneous. Often, it brings to mind the skewed melodicism of *Summerteeth*-era Wilco, melding scrappy and noisy touches with sensitive heartland rock. Though he's joined by welcome guests—including Hold Steady guitarist **Tad Kubler** and vocalist **Caithlin DeMarrais**, of the sorely underrated emo outfit Rainer Maria—the focus here is on Finn's literary voice. Never a straightforward singer, he goes fully spoken-word on "God in Chicago," but songs like "Ninety Bucks" and the Memphis-soul referencing "Tangletown" showcase the melodic side of his vocal ability. On "Preludes," Finn offers a rare song drawn in part from his personal life. Recognizing in himself so much of what he draws out of his characters, Finn sings, "Fish take to water/ but licenses, they get revoked," sounding out of sorts as he drifts from bar to bar and gets mugged. He achieves a sort of transcendence—convinced of God's presence over his life—but takes as much solace in a "place to get sick." He remains a poet of the high and low. ***Jason Woodbury***

Real Estate

In Mind DOMINO

"Two Arrows," a slice of daydream-y jangle from **Real Estate**'s fourth LP, concludes with a spiraling, psychedelic crescendo—electric guitars, synthesizers and bass crisscross into a drowsy river of sound, then suddenly crash mid-wave. It's the indie-rock equivalent to the abrupt collapse of The Beatles' "I Want You (She's So Heavy)." At first, that anti-climax feels like a creative cop-out. But it could be a wink to the Brooklyn quartet's mastery of breezy, unhurried mood: For all we know, their recording software malfunctioned, but the band's still out there, ascending to the song's massive peak. Real Estate marks a new chapter with *In Mind*, moving forward without co-founder/guitarist Matt Mondanile. But they absorb that personnel blow with shocking confidence, responding with their most fluid, dynamic batch of material. Real Estate has always been a guitar band first and foremost, building tracks around the interlocking melodies of Mondanile and chief songwriter **Martin Courtney**. They maintain that focus on *In Mind* while utilizing a wider assortment of effects (the distorted rumble on "Two Arrows," the wah-wah blasts of "Serve the Song") that enrich the color palette of Courtney's stories. The hazy production of their first three LPs remains part of their homespun charm, but *In Mind*'s gleaming, hi-fi mix highlights their expanded arrangements: the lush vocal harmonies on "Stained Glass," the downpour of vintage synths during "Holding Pattern," the jagged rhythmic shifts of "Darling," Courtney's boyish falsetto radiating over the drum machine and slide guitar of "After the Moon." If Real Estate's earlier work is a rainy afternoon nap, then *In Mind* is the post-storm rainbow. ***Ryan Reed***

Spoon

Spoon

Hot Thoughts MATADOR

Has it really been more than 20 years? When **Spoon** released their debut, *Telephono*, back in 1996, the indie-rock landscape was about to go through a profound series of changes, sparked in large part by technological leaps in digital recording and studio electronics. For frontman **Britt Daniel** and his bandmates, that meant gradually augmenting their guitar-based sound, often compared to Pavement or the Pixies, with more art-pop and even glam elements, thanks to Daniel's growing obsession with the keyboard as a writing tool. *Hot Thoughts* reunites Spoon with the label that signed them, as well as with producer **Dave Fridmann**, whose well-known touch with The Flaming Lips peeks through in the psychedelic flourishes of the catchy title track and the Beatles-like "Tear It Down," for starters. Apparently, the band drew profound sustenance from David Bowie's oddball classic *Lodger*, the last of his "Berlin Trilogy" with Brian Eno; it lives in the swirling textures of "WhisperI'lllistentohearit" and the slow-boiling four-on-the-floor dance beat of drummer **Jim Eno** (no relation to Brian) that propels "Pink Up," with Daniel's hypnotic incantation of "Everything you think we are, we are" haunting the ethereal mix. Seductive and strange, this is the sound of a band that's still testing new creative waters and finding entirely new gears. ***Bill Murphy***

King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard

Flying Microtonal Banana

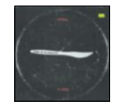
ATO

Flying Microtonal Banana is the first of **King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard**'s proposed five albums to be released in 2017. Currently taking the form of a septet, the Australian group is of the prolific and relentlessly experimenting sort, with the musicians using various strategies to crack open their cosmic surf-boogie, such as on the rustic, acoustic outsiderness of 2015's *Paper Mâché Dream Balloon* and last year's looping Möbius strip, *Nonagon Infinity*. As the title indicates, the Aussies have discovered microtonality here, embracing alternate tunings as a tried-and-true harmonic method of channeling different vibrations. While a sense of the *other* permeates the nine tracks, from the strange hypnotic breaks of "Melting" to the groan-drones of "Nuclear Fusion," it's often more of a mood than a transformative practice for the band's music, like a more exotica-obsessed version of Thee Oh Sees. Sometimes, the faraway vibes take over, as on the hand drums and snaking horns and rushing winds of the title track, but more often, the band leans into its relentless pulse, uncovering a playfulness in the type of Krautrock-influenced rhythms that usually get delivered in a stone-faced manner. Though some of the material plays more like grooves than songs (like the disc opening "Rattlesnake"), a sense of fun takes the day, as when the band plows into a spaghetti-western on "Billabong Valley," the mysteries of the spheres to be revealed right after the ending credits. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Spiral Stairs

Doris and the Daggers

NINE MILE/DOMINO



Pavement reunions seem to coincide with new **Spiral Stairs** albums—which are preciously infrequent but, when they happen, you can be assured of a batch of curvy, catchy rock songs that tug with insistence at your emotions. Back in 2009, when Pavement announced their official reunion, **Scott Kannberg** was gearing up to release *The Real Feel*, his first solo album as Spiral Stairs; and this past October, Pavement bandmate Stephen

and his band the Jicks joined Kannberg onstage for his 50th birthday party in San Francisco, just as he'd logged the finishing touches on *Doris and the Daggers*. A tinge of bitter sweetness colors the music—friend and drummer Darius Minwalla passed away shortly before the studio was booked—but Kannberg's indomitable optimism never lets the mood get too maudlin, so songs like "Angel Eyes," a tribute to fallen loved ones, comes across as a jangly, Cali-cosmic road jaunt, while "Emoshuns," a catalog of heartbreak and hope featuring Broken Social Scene's **Kevin Drew**, chugs along on a muted guitar riff in the vein of vintage Pretenders. There are more guests on board, notably **Kelley Stoltz** (acoustic guitar on "AWM") and The National's **Matt Berninger** (backing vocals on "Exiled Tonight"), giving Kannberg ample room to probe his range as a songwriter. After eight years off the grid, the guy that rocked Pavement's "Date With Ikea," among other gems, still has plenty of digging to do. ***Bill Murphy***

Conor Oberst

Salutations NONESUCH

"And they're spread gossamer thin/ Pushed to the edge, frayed at the ends," **Conor Oberst** sings over a folk-rock waltz, detailing one man's spiral into substance abuse and infidelity. But the line feels relevant to the songwriter's own career: In 2015, Oberst canceled his reunion tour with indie-punk band Desaparecidos, citing "laryngitis, anxiety and exhaustion." In that fragile state, he decamped to his hometown of Omaha and wrote a slew of songs on acoustic guitar and piano. Those raw home demos ultimately became 2016's *Ruminations*, which many critics heralded as a return to form, partly because of its focus on shrewd character portraits and his inimitable, warbled yelp. But Oberst wasn't done tinkering, so he rerecorded the full LP (and seven new cuts) with backing band **The Felice Brothers** and iconic drummer **Jim Keltner**. The result is *Salutations*, which loses the intimacy of its predecessor but gains a wider, more engaging spectrum of sounds. "Till St. Dymphna Kicks Us Out" comes to life with Keltner's tick-tock hi-hat; a gliding violin transports "Too Late to Fixate" from melancholy meditation to cathartic parade. Almost all of *Ruminations* is injected with new life—unfortunately, some of the unheard material stretches that folk-rock vibe, well, gossamer thin. "Empty Hotel by the Sea" feels like a rootsier take on Oberst's Bright Eyes classic "At the Bottom of Everything," down to the vocal melody and phrasing. *Ruminations* is essential Oberst—just a bit too much of it. ***Ryan Reed***

Taj Mahal

Labor of Love ACOUSTIC SOUNDS

In 1998, the backstory goes, **Taj Mahal** was on tour and a man named **Tim Duffy**, head of the Music Maker Relief Foundation, took to recording the blues great in various hotels along the way. About half of the songs featured Mahal solo; on the others, he was joined by an assortment of other MMRF-associated artists. None of it was released at the time; now it's Mahal's 47th album and first in four years. It's delicious stuff. Mahal was miked up close, allowing every crisp nuance of his voice and guitar to be recorded cleanly and clearly; that guitar work, especially, is so in-your-face that you'll feel like you're sitting at the artist's feet. Some of the material will be familiar to anyone who's followed Taj Mahal, or at least his brand of acoustic blues, for any length of time. The opening number, "Stagger Lee," is given a reverential traditional treatment, and "Fishin' Blues," regardless of how many times he's cut it, still delights. Mahal takes lyrical and rhythmic liberties with "Walkin' Blues," presented here in a bare-bones rendition even starker than the familiar Robert Johnson version; and Mississippi John Hurt's "My Creole Belle" is sweet and tasty. The duets, for the most part, are enjoyable as well—the slide guitar on "John Henry," with **Etta Baker**, is sharp and sleek—but in the end, you may end up wishing that the entire set could've been just pure Taj and nothing but Taj. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

The New Pornographers

Jethro Tull

The String Quartets BMG/THE END

Throughout the 1970s prime of progressive rock, numerous bands took a "symphonic" approach, piling instruments into ornate soundscapes. But **Jethro Tull** earned that label more literally: Aided by orchestral arranger Dee Palmer, mastermind **Ian Anderson** composed masterpiece LPs like 1971's *Aqualung* and the following year's *Thick as a Brick* with space for legitimate string sections. On 1975's *Minstrel in the Gallery*, the orchestra is beyond decorative—as essential to the songs as the bandleader's zig-zagging flute or Martin Barre's thunderous electric guitar. So on first glance, the concept for Anderson's latest Tull outing feels redundant. Why bother with *String Quartets* when you could savor the thrill of rock meeting full-blown orchestra? But the album proves more daring—and engrossing—than the title suggests. Collaborating with arranger **John O'Hara** and the **Carducci Quartet**, Anderson discovers new harmonic depth in straightforward compositions like "Bungle in the Jungle" and "Living in the Past." (Eternal riff-monster "Locomotive Breath" is revamped with an opening, Bach-inspired cello cadenza.) And by reworking already complex material, like a breathtaking hybrid of "Songs From the Wood" and "Heavy Horses," the musicians highlight the elegance of the original themes, embellishing only with minimal flourishes. Even in this "guest" setting, adding brief vocal and flute parts on select tracks, the ever-magnetic Anderson emerges as the star: With his trademark "over-blowing" flute technique in full force, "Farm on the Freeway" is transformed from a middle-of-the-road '80s ballad into a bone-rattling epic. ***Ryan Reed***

The New Pornographers

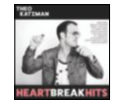
Whiteout Conditions

COLLECTED WORKS/CONCORD

The New Pornographers' seventh album marks the end of an era—and a jolting fresh start. *Whiteout Conditions* is the pseudo-supergroup's first LP without two previously crucial members: the mighty drummer Kurt Dahle, indie-rock's closest heir to John Bonham, and Destroyer mastermind Dan Bejar, whose eccentric songs offered a counterpoint to **A.C. Newman**'s more grounded power-pop. But if any band was built to withstand such creative blows, then it's the Pornos, who still boast three dynamic vocalists (Newman, **Neko Case** and **Kathryn Calder**) and a cadre of multi-instrumentalists among their ranks. Ironically, losing Bejar helped them sharpen a more cohesive tracklist. While previous albums were defined by the push-and-pull of their rotating voices, *Whiteout* offers a more seamless blend from track to track. And the arrangements feel less cluttered: Like its 2014 predecessor, *Brill Bruisers*, *Whiteout* ditches the lush strings and horns that decorated 2007's *Challengers* and 2010's *Together*. The new songs also maximize their previously underutilized dual keyboard attack, with Calder and synth wizard **Blaine Thurier** propelling the sugary pop of the title track and "Play Money" with squiggly countermelodies and atmospheric chords. "Darling Shade," which borders on Krautrock with its droning synth, showcases the brute force of guitarist **Todd Fancey** and bassist **John Collins**. More than ever before, the Pornos feel like a legitimate band rather than an all-star union. ***Ryan Reed***

Theo Katzman

Heartbreak Hits SELF-RELEASED



While **Theo Katzman** is still making his name as the drummer and guitarist of the funk/fusion band Vulfpeck, he's also already ventured into solo realms that have found him exercising his ambitions. A follow-up to his initial individual outing, 2011's *Romance Without Finance*, *Heartbreak Hits* is a self-described set of musings about "loss and letdown...a combination of personal vulnerability and imaginative songcraft." Nevertheless, based on its upbeat pop approach, it's hardly the melancholy set of songs that description might otherwise imply. "Hard Work," "As the Romans Do" and "Break Up Together" may focus on circumstance, but their tone and treatment are practically giddy, with a sheen and sparkle that rock radio stations might find hard to resist. With Katzman moving between guitar, drums and percussion, he's largely responsible for that serendipitous sound. However co-producer **Tyler Duncan**, who recorded and mixed the sessions, can also take credit for the buoyant and bubbly results. There's not a single tune here that doesn't form an instant impression, and given Katzman's indie inclinations, certain songs—"Good to Be Alone" and "My 1-Bedroom" in particular—are able to temper that gleeful sound with a more pensive perspective. So while the subjects of wrecked romance, heartbreak and heartache reside just below the surface, *Heartbreak Hits* also serves as a reminder that for all the drama and despair that accompany those feelings, there's always a chance for escape through a song. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Minus the Bear

VOIDS SUICIDE SQUEEZE

In the five years since its last proper full-length release, **Minus the Bear** has withstood significant changes. Original drummer Erin Tate split rather unexpectedly in early 2015, and *VOIDS* is their first project with new member **Kiefer Matthias** (the band's former drum tech.) The ensemble also switched labels and management—in a sense, the slate was wiped clean and the group ostensibly had some venting to do via song. Nearly every track on *VOIDS* is laced with elegantly vengeful lyrics. On lead track "Last Kiss," frontman **Jake Snider** sings, "I can't believe it ends like this." On a later cut, "Tame Beasts," keyboardist/vocalist **Alex Rose** delivers the line, "Where did we lose ourselves? ...With the death of us impending, we can't break away." It's difficult and unfair to speculate who these lyrics are directed at, but when Snider drops, "I don't want any memory of you" on a track called "Erase," it becomes clear this isn't about *Lost Loves*. Sonically, *VOIDS* is a marvelous account of everything fans have come to love about Minus the Bear. From the churning guitars layered over progged-out synth adornments on "Silver" to the epic and chaotic crescendoing coda of "Lighthouse" to close the record, this feels more like a welcome return to form for a rejuvenated bunch of talented musical technicians. The result of the band's recent adversity is an exceptionally cohesive effort that ranks among the best of its catalog to date. ***Matt Franciscovich***

Chris Thile & Brad Mehldau

Chris Thile & Brad Mehldau NONESUCH

If you've never given much thought to what a mandolin and piano would sound like together, sans any other instruments, then you're not the only one—it's an unusual mix. But if you wanted to experiment with that concept, then these two guys would be the ones you'd choose to try it out. **Chris Thile**, with both Nickel Creek and the Punch Brothers, has always been interested in pushing the possibilities of his instrument. (His last duets album was with bassist Edgar Meyer.) **Brad Mehldau**, one of the most inventive jazz pianists of the past couple of decades, has made a career out of pulling surprises out of his hat, covering tunes by Oasis and Radiohead as well as the more standard fare of Cole Porter and Miles Davis. This two-disc, one-hour studio set, which follows a handful of live dates, sees them melding their ideas seamlessly and single-mindedly on both original tunes and choice covers, like Dylan's "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" and Elliott Smith's "Independence Day." Thile is the better singer of the two, but the heart of the session is in the instrumental interplay. Mehldau, in particular, is a musician for whom category is the enemy; he's always bolting away from expectations. Thile is a dazzling player, who, at times, seems content to let his collaborator make the big decisions but then, every so often—starting with the Jeff Buckley-esque lead track, "The Old Shade Tree"—takes matters into his own hands, guiding the music to places that mere mortals simply never would imagine it could go. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

WHY?

Moh Lhean JOYFUL NOISE

While writing **WHY?**'s cinematic fifth LP, **Yoni Wolf** suffered a health scare that nudged him toward a more optimistic, live-in-the-moment mindset. But since he's built a career on self-deprecating alt-rap cynicism, the shift seems worrying. After all, some artists work best when they're miserable. But *Moh Lhean* is a new creative leap, full of sonic detours and cathartic lyricism. The centerpiece is "Proactive Evolution," a symphonic-sized indie-pop tornado: Wolf details physical anguish with reliably vivid imagery—he's a "fresco angel" "gasping for exit through unknown air"—as a bonkers arrangement swells with flute, electric guitar, piano, bass, congas and vocal harmonies. As he did on 2012's *Mumps, Etc.*, Wolf abandons the complex rap verses that balanced out his early work—still a risky move, given his shaky singing and nasally tone. Some fans may bristle at *Moh Lhean*'s accessibility. (Despite its lush, shapeshifting arrangement, "Easy" could soundtrack a road-trip scene in a big-budget Hollywood dramedy.) But Wolf is done fucking with the naysayers. "I know I've gotta submit to whatever it is in control," he croons on "One Mississippi." He's being modest. With *Moh Lhean*, he's still shadowing his own mercurial intuition. ***Ryan Reed***

Arbouretum

Song of the Rose THRILL JOCKEY

A brisk mineral tang pervades the new record from this Baltimore-based quartet. Some bands go cosmic and glacial to achieve a sense of grandeur—super slow tempos and abrasive textures. But **Arbouretum** capture a natural sublime, with songs that reference the elements—wind, plants, sky, fire, stone, mesas, canyons, sacred rivers, the heavens—and with a clarity to the sound. This is not murky music. It has an invigorating crispness to it. The whole record sounds like music written as some sort of purification ritual. "Let the water run, until it comes out clear," goes a line from "Dirt Trails." One track is called "Absolution Song." The first words, set to a kind of

ring-dance rhythm, are "I wrote a song for absolution/ I needed one that could go back in time." There's mysticism, poetry and philosophy percolating through these songs, but it's never heavy-handed or grandiose. The melodies rise with a folk familiarity. If singer/guitarist and founder **Dave Heumann** is interested in balance and calm, then it doesn't keep him from writing and playing aching and forceful music. Somehow—and it doesn't make total sense—this record evokes Led Zeppelin's *Presence* or the poppy moments (there were only a few) of Emerson, Lake & Palmer, with suggestions of Anglo-Saxon and pagan affinities, but without any bombast. Arbouretum is playing 21st-century classic rock, with just enough epic ambition and the right amount of self-restraint and humility to keep everything in proportion. Which is to say, it's strong and good.

John Adamian

The Black Angels

Death Song PARTISAN

"I can help you dream; I can help you scream," **The Black Angels** sing, coaxing us into another bewitching psych-rock vortex. Indeed, soaking in *Death Song*, it's easy to lose yourself in abstract dreaming and screaming. But in crafting their fifth LP, the Austin quintet drew equally from reality and fantasy, inspired by the contentious atmosphere surrounding the 2016 Presidential Election. You can grasp traces of their ire throughout: On "Medicine," which sounds like The Velvet Underground tripping on LSD at Studio 54, they allude to the greed behind a broken health-care system; during the hypnotic death march of "Currency," they lament how cash governs our lives and tears us apart. This lyrical focus offers *Death Song* an unexpected real-life relevance, but let's face it—The Black Angels' essential strength, like most psych bands, is escapism. With his crystalline production, indie-rock legend **Phil Eck** (Fleet Foxes, The Shins) helps the band expand the already dynamic range of 2013's *Indigo Meadow*, captaining their adventures in funky Krautrock-drone ("I Dreamt"), Shins-y pop jangle ("Estimate") and woozy stoner-blues that make The Black Keys' recent attempts sound half-assed by comparison ("I'd Kill for Her," "Comanche Moon"). The album ends with "Life Song," a signature space-launch. "How can I explain with no voice?" **Alex Maas** ponders over *Dark Side*-styled piano and rippling Mellotron. As usual, The Black Angels are up to that task. *Ryan Reed*

Future Islands

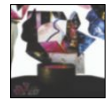
The Far Field 4AD

You can't make this shit up: After toiling in indie obscurity for eight years, **Future Islands** scored an unexpected breakout hit with triumphant synth-pop single "Seasons (Waiting on You)," thanks almost entirely to their viral-friendly performance on *The Late Show*, highlighted by frontman **Samuel Herring**'s theatrical stage antics. Throughout the corresponding album, *Singles*, the Baltimore trio sanded off the experimental fringes of their music, crafting banger after banger of New-Wave synthesizer pads, post-rock bass chug and Herring's mercurial warbling—itself a reliably gripping mix of vampiric croon and death-metal bellow. So the pressure was high for *The Far Field*, their fifth LP: Could they conjure another lightning strike, and would that require the spotlight of late-night TV? These songs are even more laser-focused, with Herring contouring his voice into fascinating new shapes. On the soulful "Ran," he nearly belts himself hoarse; "Beauty of the Road" peaks with a layered mass of crooning, as he revs his vocal chords like stepping on a gas pedal in neutral. Throughout, he layers his instrument with harmonies and backing shouts—for the first time, he sounds invigorated by the act of singing, not just emoting. The band's bread-and-butter synth-bass-drums palette often grows predictable ("Cave"), so the most thrilling moments doodle outside the lines—like the tropical groove of "North Star" or the sensual slow-jam atmosphere of "Candles." They may have been memes, but as *The Far Field* proves, Future Islands are no flukes. *Ryan Reed*

Mind Over Mirrors

Undying Color

PARADISE OF BACHELORS



Six albums into his ongoing **Mind Over Mirrors** project, on *Undying Color*, **Jaime Fennelly** expands from a solo act to a rich ensemble of musicians, performing a new kind of electronic pocket symphony. Adding tangible forms below his harmonium explorations and experimental colors, the seven tracks feature percussion (via **Jon Mueller** of Death Blues) and, often, vocals (via **Haley Fohr** of Circuit des Yeux/ Jackie Lynn, returning from 2015's *The Voice Calling*). Where Fennelly's former Peeesseye collaborator Chris Forsyth has channeled his guitar into the easily identifiable boundaries of his Solar Motel Band, Fennelly's self-consciously wide-reaching composition sets its course for distant horizons. Pieces like "Splintering" (featuring **Mike Weis**' singing bowls alongside unearthly vocals) seem as if they could have come from unearthed sessions, from Brian Eno's *Another Green World*, while more rhythmic excursions, driven by fiddle (via **Jim Becker** of Califone), almost arrive from nowhere and everywhere at once. On the album-opening "Restore & Slip," Becker's circular patterns weave their way into Mueller's drums, a hypnotic and unlikely setup for the rest of the album, which unfolds at a more unhurried and less dramatic pace. With constant scene changes and movement, *Undying Color* is far from abstract, but the wordless vocals of "Glossolaliac" provide an earthly tether for the intercosmic travel that minds and mirrors sometimes find.

Jesse Jarnow

Once & Future Band

Once & Future Band CASTLE FACE

Once & Future Band's debut album is complex and cerebral, a chimera of lounge vocals, bubblegum harmonies, prog backbone, electro-jazz jammage, New York lyricism and British psych-rock flourishes. Its modes shift constantly, a wonder of composition and studiocraft. "How Does It Make You Feel" blasts in like Liverpool, with Beach Boys harmonies. The bass and drums feel front and center, with ever-changing keyboard tones in the lead and guitars adding flavor. On "I'll Be Fine," **Joel Robinow**'s vocals ramp up like Ziggy Stardust: "You're the kind of girl who makes me disappear/ in our living room/ you just look at me and I'm not there." The feel is theatrical. It's rock opera. The song keeps shifting into different soundscapes as new guitar and keyboard sounds sweep in in waves. On "Rolando," a model-airplane-building man-child huffs the glue for escape; the music recreates the dream feel of his high. The voice in the post-cataclysmic prog-jazz jam "Standing in the Wake of Violence" looks around at piles of rubble that used to be protective walls. Now, the stones are driving him mad. This is dark and unsettling music, in that grand psychedelic tradition. It's one for the headphones.

Richard B. Simon

Ear Crystals BY RICHARD GEHR

The search for other-world audio gems

Watt's new? Minuteman bassist **Mike Watt**'s plaid-shirted affability brought good vibes to Southern California punk rock's surly disposition. Which partially explains why the alt-rock pantheon turned out for Watt's all-hands solo debut, *Ball-Hog or Tugboat?* Joined by **Dave Grohl** (drums), **Eddie Vedder** (guitar), **Pat Smear** (guitar) and **William Goldsmith** (drums), Watt took his solo act on the road with *"ring spiel" tour '95* (Columbia/Legacy), documenting a rambunctious night in Chicago. Watt's working-man grumble and trampolining bass focus a set consisting of Minutemen and fIREHOSE gems along with nifty covers like Daniel Johnston's "Walking the Cow."

Anxiety attack. Dub magus **Adrian Sherwood** rarely got further outside than when he scrapbooked together the disquieting haunted-house sounds, ghostly emissions and factory rumblings that flow through young **Annie Anxiety**'s *Soul Possession* (Dais). Annie was a New York punk rocker who fell in with London anarcho-rockers Crass in the early '80s. She has a remarkable facility for channeling familiar American female voices, such as the endangered hitchhiker in "Third Gear Kills" and middle-class housewife in "Burnt Offerings," who inhabit Sherwood's discombobulated soundscapes like angry spirits. They also sound depressingly contemporary. "If they can't kill your body, then they'll slaughter your soul," she observes of the powers that be.

Mall of sound. It only took me nine albums, but I'm delighted to have discovered confessional Michigan singer-songwriter **Fred Thomas** on *Changer* (Polyvinyl). Thomas sings tuneful indie-pop from the POV of a guy in his 40s coming to terms with failure, the youth and life as a distended "snuff film." Lo-fi electronic and instrumental interludes punctuate these brash, emphatic notes to himself and others. In the epic "Mallwalkers," Thomas analyzes a mall's all-ages population—from its defeated employees to the hopeless teens stalking its corridors—until a hurricane of guitars and strings sweeps him away.

Pangs for the memories. Dig the supreme artistry of Glasgow-based folkie **Alasdair Roberts**, whose haunting new *Pangs* (Drag City) suggests what The Incredible String Band might have evolved into. His words suggest both Robert Hunter and Joanna Newsom. "Friend of mine, come in to dine and drink with me now, times are harder," he sings on the title track. "Bitter nuts and sour wine are all we find within the larder." The music rocks in a medieval kind of way, especially "The Angry Laughing God," which ponders a malign deity with carnivalesque gusto.

Guys and Galás. I've been a big fan of **Diamanda Galás** since hearing her 1982 single "The Litanies of Satan"/"Wild Women with Steak-Knives (The Homicidal Love Song for Solo Scream)." Galás continues her noise-opera approach to vocalizing on *All the Way* (Intravenal Sound Operations), the more approachable of two new releases. (The other is *At Saint Thomas the Apostle Harlem.*) *All the Way* is a collection of piano-accompanied covers. Highlights include the traditional "O Death" and Johnny Paycheck's "(Pardon Me) I've Got Someone to Kill," both sung in tones of otherworldly despair at tempos offering plenty of time to contemplate morbidity, if not to die for.

William Basinski

A Shadow in Time

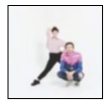
TEMPORARY RESIDENCE LTD

From the opening of its title-track tape-loop, **William Basinski**'s latest is almost Wagnerian in the ways it both rises and descends, carving out an intervallic scaffolding that seems to reach into the atmosphere while being rooted in unseen depths. Basinski is best known for his epic "Disintegration Loops" series, which used aging and deteriorating tape stock–the magnetic material was slowly coming unstuck to the tape backing, making for works that actually dematerialized as they progressed. On the near-17-minute "A Shadow in Time," the music hovers like a bright, metallic cloud. There isn't a real, blatant pulsation, which is a relief, in that the seams of the music don't attract attention. The other track, "For David Robert Jones," an elegy for David Bowie, has more rhythmic and melodic elements that spin and rub against each other. Basinski's music draws on classical minimalism, but there's a looming sadness and sense of loss that make these pieces strangely emotional. Some of his loops were made from tape pieces that had been chewed up by his cat. The results are hypnotic and enduring, despite the feeling of evanescence that hangs around Basinski's ambient music.

John Adamian

Sylvan Esso

What Now LOMA VISTA



"I've got the moves of a TV queen," **Amelia Meath** croons on "Radio," an exuberant electro-pop anthem. "Folk-girl hero in a magazine/ Faking the truth in a new pop song." The irony is rich: If you actually stumbled on this song on real-life radio, casually listening on your morning commute, then it'd be easy to write off **Sylvan Esso** as the kind of preening Billboard-chasers their song lampoons. But even if Meath is singing with her tongue firmly planted in cheek, it's worth noting that "Radio," with its silky synth arrangement and manicured chorus, could wind up being the North Carolina duo's first major hit. *What Now*, the group's second LP, is deceptive that way. A trademark example is "Die Young." Over producer **Nick Sanborn**'s minimal electronic pulses, Meath sweetly daydreams about perishing in a tragic plane crash–cuddly at first, gloomy the longer you examine it. Sylvan Esso explored this same light-and-dark approach on their 2014 debut, but even their best songs felt tentative–somewhat constrained by their bedroom-studio setting. *What Now* exudes more confidence and sonic color: Meath, who softly cooed most of her vocals on the previous LP, now implements a more dynamic attack with some cabaret twang here, some R&B roar there. And Sanborn's production has billowed into 3-D, weaving synthetic tones with organic flourishes (the clattering jazz-drum loops of "Kick Jump Twist," the acoustic guitar and string loops on "The Glow"). Forget the radio–Sylvan Esso have taken a more crucial creative leap. *Ryan Reed*

Sylvan Esso

1 Dead & Company

"China Cat Sunflower"
Live from Folsom Field, Boulder, CO 7/2/16

Dead & Company will kick off their summer tour on Saturday, May 27 in Las Vegas. The celebrated group's cross-country run will include a return to many iconic venues such as Fenway Park, Folsom Field and Citi Field, and will wrap with a first-time performance at Wrigley Field.

www.deadandcompany.com

2 Andy Mowatt's Steely Jam

"Jello Molds"
From the album *Vol. 1: Rock. Hard. Funk*
Self-released

Andy Mowatt's Steely Jam is a funk-driven powerhouse from Lancaster, Pa. Their debut album, *Vol. 1: Rock.Hard.Funk* is out now, featuring top-shelf musicianship, 11 eclectic, danceable originals, one classic mash-up, a killer rhythm section (Aaron Trasatt, Taylor Wade, Quinn Slonaker, Jaren Angud) and many layered guest musicians—the "jam-fam."

www.andymowatt.com

3 Slightly Stoopid

"Franklin's Tower" (Feat. Bob Weir)
From the album *Live at Roberto's TRI Studios 2, 4.21.16*
Stoopid Records

Slightly Stoopid joined Bob Weir at his home-base, TRI Studios, for the second installment of *Live at Roberto's TRI Studios on April 21, 2016*. A legendary set of music transpired, including "Franklin's Tower" featuring Weir on this unique rendition of a Grateful Dead classic, and a star-studded "Purple Rain" with Weir, Angelo Moore (Fishbone) and Karl Denson on the morning after Prince passed away, as requested by Weir.

www.slightlystoopid.com

4 Rugby Road

"Give It Away"
From the album *EP III*
WYD? Records

Rugby Road—the Philadelphia-based trio—returns with the release of their new EP, *III*. Their unique sound has garnered a cult-like following in Philly, and has allowed them to share the stage with a diverse range of artists, including the Allman Brothers Band, Maceo Parker, Rusted Root, Bill Kreutzmann and moe. Their late-night set with members of Phish in Philly has become the stuff of legend.

www.rugbyroadband.com

5 Samantha Fish

"Crow Jane"
From the album *Chills & Fever*
Ruf Records

Blues rocktress, Samantha Fish, goes all in with her fourth Ruf Records release, delivering a heavy dose of *Chills & Fever,* recorded deep in America's Rust Belt in Detroit—the city that has filled America's musical tapestry with its legendary Motown Sound to it's embedded punk music scene.

www.samanthafish.com

6 The Alpaca Gnomes

"Welcome Home"
From the album *Welcome Home*
Self-released

The Alpaca Gnomes' new title track "Welcome Home" kicks off their second album with a vibrant stomp-and-groove melody. The rock-folk ensemble from Connecticut features Benny Mikula (vocals/guitar), Mike Gargano (drums), Kimberly Nordling-Curtin (violin), Marty Amidon (Bass), Chris Barry (guitar), Matt Summ (Percussion) and Tim Stone (keys).

www.thealpacagnomes.com

7 CBDB

"Old Dog"
Single
Self-released

CBDB's blend of soulful vocals, tasteful songwriting and virtuosic instrumentation creates a sound that has catapulted this band to the forefront of the prog-rock music genre. Onstage, the band parades tight and ambitious compositions that seamlessly give way to loose adventurous improvisation.

www.cbdbmusic.com

8 The High Divers

"Give It Up"
From the album *Riverlust*
Hearts & Plugs

There's no hiding that the members of The High Divers hail from South Carolina. A subtle twang dots their rock 'n' roll landscape. The Southern snarl of Tom Petty, and genre clashing of Wilco is ever-present in their music. New album out in August 2017.

www.thehighdivers.com

9 Roger Street Friedman

"Puffs of Smoke"
From the album *Shoot the Moon*
The Playroom Records

Roger Street Friedman's latest release, *Shoot the Moon*, exudes an album-oriented cohesion—a broad spectrum of feelings and genres threaded together by his well-developed aesthetic sense. His stylistic calling card is both earthy and urbane, spanning pastoral folk, euphoric New Orleans-style, horn-driven pop-rock, alt-country, blues and R&B.

www.rogerstreetfriedman.com

10 Monotronic

"Michelle Kwan (Load Up the Bong)"
Single
Self-released

Monotronic is a collection of NYC-based musicians that blend a wide array of genres to produce their own unique sound. Described by the musicfestnews.com as the "best new electronic dance band of New York this year," their sound can be described as a mix of electronic dance music with strong world-music influences.

www.monotronicband.com

11 PJKTS

"California State"
From the album *PJKTS*
Self-released

Songwriter James Mason, previously in pop tinged rock outfit The Vantage and pop punk revelers Safety Word Orange, is set to release a self titled LP with his new band under the name PJKTS. The project, also known as Paper Jackets, emerges from the LA indie pop scene inhabited by producer Ethan Kaufmann a driving influence of the band's electrifying, synth pop sound.

www.pjkts.com

12 Curse of Lono

"He Takes My Place"
From the album *Severed*
Submarine Cat Records

Founded by Felix Bechtolsheimer, formerly the singer-guitarist in British roots pioneers Hey Negrita, Curse of Lono formed in London in early 2015. "He Takes My Place" is taken from Curse of Lono's debut album *Severed*, a sumptuously cinematic record that combines spaced-out, harmony-laden indie-folk with driving, gothic alt-rock.

www.curseoflonoband.com

13 Rebekah Todd

"Hustle"
From the album *Crooked Lines*
Self-released

Rebekah Todd, a soulful and bluesy siren, has three releases under her belt: *Forget Me Not EP* (2011), *Roots Bury Deep* (2014) and her most recent album, *Crooked Lines*, released in February 2017. Todd is set to play the main stage at FloydFest this year, along with many other festivals.

www.rebekahtodd.com

14 EDITOR'S PICK: Dispatch

"Only the Wild Onesl"
From the album *America, Location 12*
Bomber Records

Dispatch is back with "Only the Wild Ones," the first single from their forthcoming album *America, Location 12*. It's a summery song that speaks to the beauty of the world that eagerly awaits us, and our exploration of it.

www.dispatchmusic.com

15 JamOFF! Winner: Steve Norwood

"Only the Wild Onesl"
From the album *King of the Mountain*
Self-released

Singer/songwriter Steve Norwood has been performing in Alaska for over 20 years. A founding member of the popular Alaska band The Photonz, his first solo endeavor, King of the Mountain, was released in 2015 (available on iTunes, Spotify, Amazon and GooglePlay). Stay tuned for his next studio release in Summer 2017.

www.reverbnation.com/stevenorwood

David Bazan

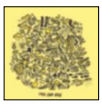
Care UNDERTOW

Even when he was making slowcore recordings under the Pedro the Lion banner, songwriter **David Bazan**'s voice—lyrically and physically—crackled with intensity. *Care*, his fifth full-length album since Pedro shuttered in 2006, follows dual 2016 efforts, *Blanco* and the Christmas album *Dark Sacred Night*. Like those albums, it finds his simmering baritone way up in the mix, and it's an instrument every bit as warm as the synthesizers he sings over. Though he's no longer a professing believer, Bazan has examined Christian ethics from the inside out since the late '90s, amassing a loyal following of emo and indie types along the way, many of whom view him as a youth-group-friendly Leonard Cohen or Bob Dylan. Don't scoff. Like those songwriters, Bazan's empathic worldview informs his songs—the minor falls and the major lifts. *Care* is something like Bazan's *New Morning*, featuring a few grand statements (the religiously dense "Permanent Record," the mini-rock-opera "Make Music") but mostly quiet, suburban scenes: a dad crawling out of his skin at the start of summer vacation, old friends resisting the urge to embark on an affair, a married couple reflecting on the life they've built together. Though Bazan has released more directly political and personal albums, *Care* taps into the Golden Rule theme that has always defined his best work. "Sometimes love isn't all that it's cracked up to be/ Keep trying" he sings, seemingly reminding himself as much as the listener of the pressing need to always consider the lives of others.

Jason Woodbury

Mac DeMarco

This Old Dog CAPTURED TRACKS



All right, let's cut it with the "**Mac DeMarco** is a slacker" talk. Yes, like everything in his discography, there's laid-back charm to his third full-length album, *This Old Dog*, but don't mistake casual for lazy. With their tight constructions and melodic sophistication, DeMarco's songs are works of craftsmanship; it takes a lot of effort to sound so effortless. Every slippery George Harrison lick or wobbly keyboard figure here is meticulously placed, arranged to achieve maximum breeze, this being the Canadian's first proper "California record," following a move to Los Angeles from Queens. Built mostly on drum-machine clicks, acoustic guitar and synth washes, the sounds here tend to blur together (likely by design), but DeMarco varies the palette with the harmonica-laden "A Wolf Who Wears Sheeps Clothes" and the R&B-flavored "On the Level," excursions that solidify his grip on classicist pop designs. But the album represents a step forward for DeMarco as a lyricist, having honed his shaggy-dog witticisms into wry, observational writing. "Honey, I cry too, you better believe it," he sings on "Still Beating," and remarking, "Often, a heart tends to change its mind" on "This Old Dog." The best songs here find Mac examining age and inevitability. On opener "My Old Man," he contemplates recognizing his father in his own reflection, and on the sparse "Sister," he faces disappointment, crooning, "Turns out not every dog has its day" over a liquid guitar. DeMarco's not defeated—not even on the somber album closer "Watching Him Fade Away"— he's just taking his lumps. Slackers don't care, and on *This Old Dog*, DeMarco cares a lot. *Jason Woodbury*

Clap Your Hands Say Yeah

Pegi Young & The Survivors

Raw SELF-RELEASED

Pegi Young's never had an easy time of it. Though a talented artist in her own right, she was often regarded as a satellite that circled the orbit of her ex, Neil Young. Still, after establishing her solo career throughout several albums, Pegi's found her footing and, with it, an independent following. That said, *Raw* is her most definitive statement yet—an album that lives up to its title with passion and verve. Pegi exorcises her shock, heartbreak and disappointment in the wake of a painful divorce that shattered the life she shared with her husband for some 36 years. It's apt that she's dubbed her band **The Survivors**—the album they helped her construct details the seven stages of grief but, more important, clears the way toward emerging intact. The inclusion of choice covers—the sassy and soulful "Trying to Live My Life Without You," a mournful "Just When I Needed You Most," a languid and unlikely take on the defiant Nancy Sinatra gem "These Boots Are Made for Walking" and a subdued remake of Don Henley's "The Heart of the Matter"—reflect differently on the circumstances, but also play to the point as well. Nevertheless, it's opening track "Why" that sets the tone, with Pegi asking her estranged mate, "Why'd you have to ruin my life?" before embracing her sobering reality, finding solace and, eventually, the grace to forgive. *Raw* is hardly unique in its pain and perspective, but it is a thoughtful, and perhaps even helpful, discourse that affirms solitary sadness is also a universal travail.

Lee Zimmerman

Clap Your Hands Say Yeah

The Tourist UNDERTOW

Watching **Clap Your Hands Say Yeah**'s evolution over the past 12 years has been both joyful and cringe-worthy. After creating an indie-rock touchstone—and defining music-blog culture—with his quirky, self-titled 2005 debut, mastermind **Alec Ounsworth** struggled to capitalize on that momentum. CYHSY's subsequent LPs expanded beyond their obvious reference points (Talking Heads, Yo La Tengo) into electro-pop and art-rock, revealing more emotional depth and musical sophistication, but many critics and fans shrugged, and the band seemed to disappear from the web headlines that first propelled them to fame. *The Tourist*, Ounsworth's fifth Clap Your Hands LP—and first as the sole original member remaining—flirts with their first album's propulsive four-on-the-floor rhythms and irreverent, snarling charm—"Down (is where I want to be)"—and while none of its songs reach the same dizzying heights as, say, "The Skin of My Yellow Country Teeth," this is easily the most varied and sonically rich work in the catalog. Mix-master **Dave Fridmann**, The Flaming Lips' longtime studio guru, is partly to thank for that: He adds widescreen drama to the subtle details, like the pleasingly in-the-red drum tones on organ-fueled "Unfolding Above Celibate Moon (Lost Angeles Nursery Rhyme)" or the juicy bass guitar on "The Pilot," the prettiest ballad Ounsworth's ever penned. Clap Your Hands will probably never harness the same cultural cachet as they did over a decade ago, but fuck those fair-weather friends anyways: Ounsworth's work feels more vital and vibrant than ever. *Ryan Reed*

Tinariwen

Elwan ANTI-

Tinariwen exists as proof that the feeling of music transcends all borders and political boundaries. The group, which hails from an area in the Saharan mountain range between Northeastern Mali and Southern Algeria, makes desert blues-rock that feels universal. Although the songs are clearly rooted in their homeland, the musicians recorded *Elwan*, their seventh album, between Joshua Tree and Morocco, evoking disparate desert landscapes that come together cohesively here. The songs don't necessarily have a nationality. The music is about how you feel when you hear it and what it evokes within you. The album features appearances by **Kurt Vile** and **Mark Lanegan**, who add to its gritty blues sensibility, and numbers like "Tiwàyyen" rely on twanging Southern riffs, a folksy intimacy and raw production. It's the sort of music we need right now in the world—music that reminds us that art doesn't need to fit into boxes based on geography or culture. Tinariwen has historically been a voice of rebellion, and that sensibility carries through. You can hear the passion and intent in the vocals, even when you don't understand the language in which they're delivered. Blues are the blues—no matter the form of the words—which is particularly evident on "Nizzagh Ijbal," an evocative ballad that pulls you right into the musicians' mood. *Emily Zemler*

Mick Harvey

Intoxicated Women MUTE

As a key member of such influential acts as The Boys Next Door, The Birthday Party and Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds, **Mick Harvey** is the unsung godfather of Australian punk. But for the past two decades, he's managed to sustain a formidable side gig translating the songbook of groundbreaking French pop icon Serge Gainsbourg to English. And coming not even six months after his last transmission from the Couleur Café, with 2016's *Delirium Tremens*, he brings the concept back to where it all started

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Reviews

with a proper sequel to his 1995 solo debut, *Intoxicated Man*. With a snide air of cheekiness, in line with the original composer, *Intoxicated Women* is not only a pithy title play but also the mission statement of the collection itself. However, he should have called it *Intoxicating Women*. Harvey assembled quite the bevy of female voices to accompany him on lush and lascivious takes of classic Serge duets such as "Prévert's Song (Chanson de Prévert)" with **Jess Ribeiro** and "While Rereading Your Letter (En Relisant Ta Lettre)" with **Sophia Brous**. He also revisits the gauzy erotica of "Je T'Aime... Moi Non Plus" here, too, only this time, Harvey sings it in German in concert with Deutschland chanteuse **Andrea Schroeder**. Harvey's series has been quite an enjoyable education in the songwriting artistry of this French icon but, honestly, one more collection like this might be encroaching toward shtick territory. ***Ron Hart***

Elektric Voodoo

Elektric Voodoo SELF-RELEASED

With their ricochet rhythms and swooping soundscapes, San Diego's **Elektric Voodoo** have officially arrived with their self-titled debut. The band's percussive underbelly is the main element that informs the music, giving it a drive and determination that permeates each of these eight tracks from beginning to end. It's an all-star ensemble—the band's chief instigator, singer, guitarist, keyboard player and songwriter **Scott Tournet** co-founded Grace Potter & The Nocturnals, while fellow keyboardist **Mark Boyce** spent time with the John Spencer Blues Explosion and G. Love. Percussionist **Ty Kiernan**, drummer **Matt Bozzone** and bassist **Evan Lucas** fill out the remainder of the roster. The sound they create in tandem is powerful and propulsive, especially on songs like the steady, surging "Mercy" and the ever-so-catchy "Boyfriend," which finds Tournet tossing out a series of soaring riffs, supported by an instrumental undercarriage boasting Lucas' relentless basslines and the steady snap of a formidable backbeat. Beyond the rhythmic thrust of their tunes, there are added hints of cosmic cacophony, and psychedelic suggestions as well. So while the music is in a constant state of overdrive, the movement and momentum are tempered by a swirl and sway that imbues the songs with fluctuating dynamics. As a result, the band effectively distances itself from the computerized approach that often accompanies a typical dance stance, focusing instead on organic sounds and authentic instrumentation. It's intriguing, enticing and engaging all at the same time—evidence of Elektric Voodoo's ability to cast a hypnotic spell. ***Lee Zimmerman***

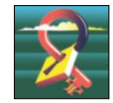
The Sadies

Northern Passages YEP ROC

The veteran Canadian quartet **The Sadies** stay positively and lovingly on-brand on their 10th album, *Northern Passages*, brimming with doom-filled twang, spaghetti-western flourishes, brotherly vocals and the dynamics of musicians who have been playing together for over 20 years. Equally adept at surprising melodic turns as rich arrangements, The Sadies come with no frills, minimalist in the sense that they achieve it as a rock band using acoustic and electric guitars. The 11 songs on *Northern Passages* thrill with hot picking ("Through Strange Eyes"), instinctive swing ("There Are No Words"), and opened up spaces that perhaps could/should extend for another 20 minutes more—all supported by the songwriting of the Good brothers, nephews of The Good Brothers (the Grateful Dead-affiliated country-rockers). Inveterate collaborators, including with The Good Brothers themselves, **Dallas** and **Travis Good** (and **Sean Dean** and **Mike Belitsky**) have recorded albums with Neko Case, John Doe of X, Gord Downie of The Tragically Hip and others. On "It's Easy (Like Walking)," fan **Kurt Vile** slides into the frontman role like a lost relative. But *Northern Passages* is at its best with the movement between irresistible and seemingly effortless garage-blasters like "Another Season Again," steel-laced alt-country laments like "The Good Years," and Byrds-y blyss like "Questions I Never Asked." When the album closes with an instrumental that purposefully moves through sections until sounding like a Western's end credit sequence ("The Noise Museum"), it doubles as an invitation into the previous 20 years of recording activity. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Temples

Volcano FAT POSSUM



Temples' debut LP, 2014's *Sun Structures*, was a paean to 1960s psychedelia, brimming with Summer of Love guitar effects and Lennon-esque melodies. The British quartet earned both adoration and venom for that retro worship, pegged by critics as a "next big thing" and simultaneously as a backward-looking bore. Their self-produced sequel, *Volcano*, is equally indebted to the past—just *more* of the past, as their vintage psych-pop is laced with massive new-wave synthesizers. But, after a while, the scattered reference points start to blur into the band's own cherry-picked sonic collage. "Roman Godlike Man" veers from *Abbey Road* riffage to a power-pop

chorus Ric Ocasek would've killed for in 1978; swooning closer "Strange or Be Forgotten" sounds like Tame Impala soundtracking a high-school prom slow dance from a John Hughes film. Even better are tracks that combine past and future: "Certainty" and "I Wanna Be Your Mirror" both showcase the band's newfound emphasis on the low-end, with bass and lead synths buzzing over battering ram-drum grooves. Temples sound awkward and unnatural when they lapse into hazy reverb atmosphere ("How Would You Like to Go"). But when frontman **James Bagshaw** sinks his teeth into a meaty hook, few of their psychedelic peers—or forefathers, for that matter—can approach their orbit. *Ryan Reed*

Shintaro Sakamoto

Love If Possible ZELONE

On his third solo release, Japanese guitarist/singer and studio whiz **Shintaro Sakamoto** has made a warped and catchy soft-pop record. It droops and sags with wall-melting, spongy reggae grooves, reimagined bossa-nova pop and Chipmunk disco. Volume pedals make guitar sounds zoom by in full Doppler-effect mode. Ultra-minimalist drumming gets paired with phantom female-backing vocals and out-of-nowhere marimba. Woozy slide guitar pervades. The result is something like Hawaiian music fused with Nigerian juju and Day-Glo android funk, or like Beck on a Steely Dan binge. The six-plus-minute "Others" has an extended reed-straining sax solo. There isn't a shortage of shakers and scrapers. Vocoder vocals make an appearance as well. Sakamoto has internalized the workings of pop, including all kinds of sub-genre niches, and he's synthesized it all to make a strange and even unsettling album. In the past, Sakamoto has written about dystopian visions, isolation and destruction. The surface of the music often seems at odds with its core, but that's part of what makes it provocative. For a quick taste of what's far-out about Sakamoto's work, listen to "Purging the Demons," which has sped-up backing vocals, trebly honky-tonk-ish guitar set against woozy slide riffs and a conga-enabled big-collar dance beat. It would seem like there's too much happening, except that there's an appealing emptiness to it all. In places—and this is meant as praise—this sounds like a troupe of robots who learned to play dub while sipping on tropical drinks. The delirium turns out to be pretty catchy. *John Adamian*

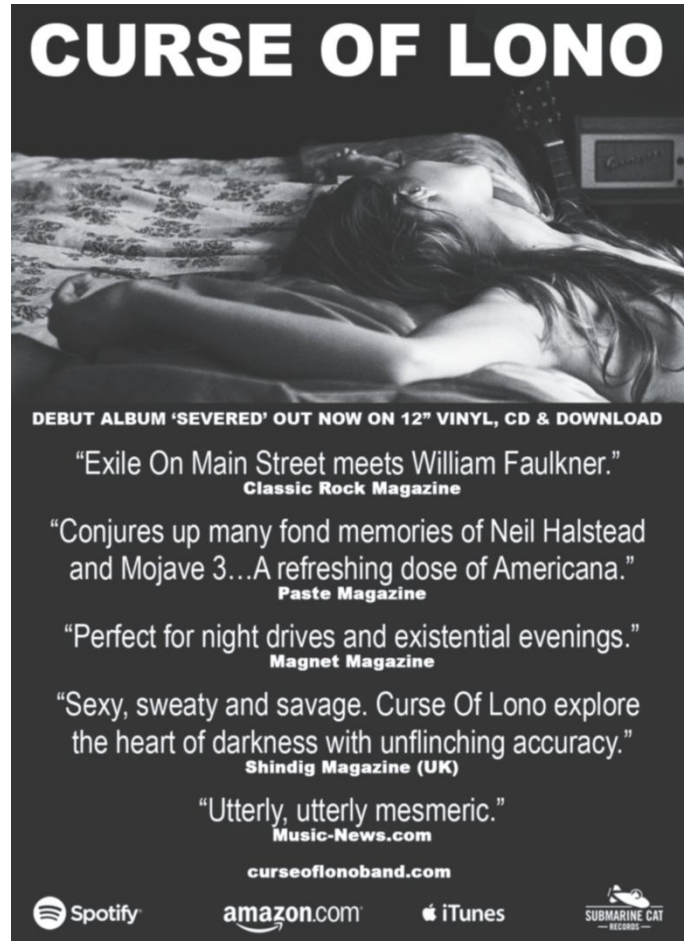
Tennis

Yours Conditionally

MUTUALLY DETRIMENTAL/THIRTY TIGERS

Why is "breezy" such a dirty word in indie culture? On their sultry fourth LP, **Patrick Riley** and **Alaina Moore** continue to discredit that notion, sculpting Fender Rhodes grooves, cloudy-day guitar patterns and feather-light vocal harmonies into irresistible pop. Moore commands every second of the self-produced *Yours Conditionally*, even when their chord progressions teeter toward blandness ("Fields of Blue," "Modern Woman"). Throughout, she croons melismatic hooks in her diva-as-butterfly tone, highlighting tracks like acoustic waltz "Please Don't Ruin This for Me" and pulsating electro-soul anthem "Matrimony." At times, the husband-and-wife duo is deceptively edgy with the arrangements and production, from the underwater EQ that opens the aptly titled "Island Music" to the half-time rhythmic hiccups of prog doo-wop centerpiece "In the Morning I'll Be Better." With the more hi-fi approach of their recent work,

Tennis



Reviews

Tennis feels like Beach House's more outgoing, less peculiar cousins–sculpting tunes with crisp contours and heavy reverb, although better suited for a luau than a gothic seance. "Tell me, what can I give if all my work is bleak and abstracted?" Moore sings over the butter-smooth, psychedelic R&B of "Ladies Don't Play Guitar." Her sarcasm is palpable, but there's a roundabout truth in the lyric: Tennis never bothers with storms when there's always a new breeze to catch.
Ryan Reed

Cloud Nothings

Life Without Sound CARPARK

Cloud Nothings began as a lo-fi bedroom solo project but they have blossomed into a legitimate rock band over the past eight years. **Dylan Baldi**'s last two LPs, 2012's *Attack on Memory* and 2014's *Here and Nowhere Else*, capitalized on the visceral drama of the group's live show, enriching his noisy indie-rock with a live-in-the-room spark. *Life Without Sound* is the next logical step in this evolution: maintaining the heaviness of those previous albums, but with the studio polish and melodic focus of a more mature band. *Sound* kicks off with the brooding "Up to the Surface," a balance of post-punk atmosphere and lullaby vocals that could be a Fleetwood Mac song if it wasn't for the distortion. Even their most unhinged moments, like the snarling pop-punk of "Darkened Rings" or the jagged dagger guitar fills of "Internal World," gleam like a freshly waxed limousine. But don't mistake smooth production for sanitized songwriting. The album climaxes with a tirade, with Baldi spiraling into madness over a cacophony of cymbals and guitar splatter. "I find it hard to realize my fate," he yelps. On the musical front, he's making it sound easy.
Ryan Reed

Los Campesinos!

Sick Scenes WICHITA

Let's start at the end, literally: "What if this is how we die?" **Los Campesinos!** gleefully chime on new album closer "Hung Empty," counteracting that morbid curiosity with a peppy synthesizer hook. That's pretty much been the band's M.O. from day one: making depression sound like a goddamn carnival. It's been four years since the indie-rock septet's last LP, *No Blues*, but the Campesinos crew stored up a decade's worth of angst for *Sick Scenes*, their gloomiest yet most celebratory work to date. In his signature shriek, frontman **Gareth** broaches subjects like mental illness (the buzzing "I Broke Up in Amarante"), small-town misery (chamber-pop ballad "The Fall of Home") and drug addiction ("5 Flucloxacillin," which suggests an unhinged Coldplay), contrasting with his bandmates' dynamic sprawl of power chords, post-punk drum grooves, glockenspiel, keyboards and violin. At times, you wish Gareth would pipe down to offer the others more freedom to roam. But *Sick Scenes* thrives on his grim revelations and gallows humor: "There is beauty in the world, I have been told, by people I've nothing but trust in," he sings–the perfect lyric for his business card. It's the classic Campesinos cocktail: a shot of euphoria, a chaser of despair.
Ryan Reed

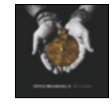
The Feelies

In Between BAR/NONE

The Feelies have always been mercurial; it's hard to get a solid feel for them, if you will. In their original incarnation, from 1976–92, they virtually invented the lo-fi, indie chill-rock that has since been taken up by countless others. They always made it sound so effortless. A couple of busily strummed chords over all sorts of–to borrow their debut album's title–crazy rhythms. The Feelies' earliest tunes seemed to emerge from some kind of mysterious mist rather than the minds of determined songwriters, yet they embedded themselves the first time out and the hundredth, too. After a hiatus that lasted close to two decades, founders **Glenn Mercer** and **Bill Million**–primary songwriters and guitarists both–put the band back together with bassist **Brenda Sauter** and drummer/percussionist **Dave Weckerman**, and damn if they don't sound like they've been away for a weekend. *In Between* will be instantly familiar to the devoted and as good an intro as any to the uninitiated. The title track–both opening the album acoustically and closing it, droning-Velvets style–is the perfect summation of how the band makes the most of its limited sonic range, while mid-album tracks, like the elegiac "Pass the Time" and the soaring psychedelia of "Gone, Gone, Gone," burnish the legend. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Doyle Bramhall II

Rich Man CONCORD



Why would an artist take 15 years between albums? **Doyle Bramhall II** had at least one good reason: Eric Clapton, who brought him into his fold as a co-guitarist for more than a decade. There

were a bunch of other reasons, too: Tedeschi Trucks Band, Roger Waters and at least a dozen other names whose paychecks you wouldn't want to turn down. So Bramhall had a lot to say by the time he finally decided to put his own name on a record again, and several of the 13 tracks on *Rich Man* are lengthy and wordy; they almost burst with that good-to-be-back-up-front feeling. Fortunately, though, *Rich Man* never feels weighted down. The title track's opening lyrics—"Stars turn brilliant when the sands are running low, everything that we've ignored becomes what we want most, I don't wanna wait till I know what I'm losing"—might look daunting on paper, but Bramhall bathes them in a desert-blues motif picked out on acoustic strings, and funky rhythms draw you in rather than put you out. By midway, as the story plays out ("I'm letting go of yesterday and reachin' out for destiny"), he's got a strong groove in place and your attention is piqued. "New Faith," a couple of tracks earlier, rolls out at a leisurely pace, **Norah Jones**' harmony vocal sweetening the sentiment, while "Mama Can't Help You," the album's opener, is one big hunk of funk that establishes straight off that Bramhall—and his array of guitars—are rarin' to go. Those guitars, in fact, are never far from the front line, and on the nearly 10-minute "The Samanas," in particular, they clobber you from left and right till you're ready to surrender to their bigness. Doyle Bramhall II waited a long time to make this statement, and when he did, he didn't hold back a thing.

Jeff Tamarkin

Cloud Nothings

Cold War Kids

L.A. Divine CAPITOL

The best **Cold War Kids** songs exist on the thrilling verge of collapse—bashed-out rhythms, somersaulting guitars and **Nathan Willett**'s wild, swinging vocals dive-bombing through theatrical melodies. It's indie-rock blasted to the rafters, and all the moving pieces somehow coexist, fusing into a whole that's simultaneously funky and emotional. On their sixth album, *L.A. Divine*, Cold War Kids tighten up a bit and tone down the unpredictability, but it's easy to look over those changes as Willett delivers some of the more satisfying hooks of his career. First single "Love Is Mystical" finds the band at its absolute best. The song stomps along with pounded keys and a pulsing bassline until the chorus sets everything into a dark, explosive march. Willett belts like he's channeling the Holy Spirit: "Love is mystical, love will break the chains... give you the power to believe again." Elsewhere, the band adds a pop shine to the formula. "Invincible" has the same shimmering, indie-rock earworm potential as anything by Passion Pit or even Vampire Weekend. And on "So Tied Up," the band delivers a down and dirty soul jam featuring howling vocals from **Bishop Briggs**. Still, the element of bluesy danger apparent on breakthrough *Robbers & Cowards* is largely lacking in this trip through LA, with a few too many slow, atmospheric tunes that seem to turn to late-era U2 for inspiration. Divine? Not quite. But inarguably good.

Justin Jacobs

Dan Monick (Cold War Kids)

Cold War Kids

Gone Is Gone

Echolocation RISE/BLACK DUNE

From day one, **Gone Is Gone** have downplayed their own fame: obscuring their faces in press photos and insisting in interviews that they aren't a "supergroup," despite featuring a hodgepodge of modern rock/metal veterans (Mastodon singer/bassist **Troy Sanders**, Queens of the Stone Age guitarist **Troy Van Leeuwen**, At the Drive-In drummer **Tony Hajjar** and composer/multi-instrumentalist **Mike Zarin**). Deflecting expectations is a sound strategic move, as the quartet's debut LP, *Echolocation*, feels like its own brooding beast. Zarin, the band's least famous but most crucial member, establishes a spacious, textural tone with shadowy synth interludes, showcasing the skills of his underrated bandmates. Sanders, whose bass and vocals are often buried in Mastodon's distorted deluge, shines throughout—stretching from whispers (the spooky "Sentient") to octave-spanning bellows (post-rock epic "Colourfade"). Some moments dissolve into monochrome metal mush ("Resurge"), but when Gone Is Gone push themselves, they sound like no one but themselves.

Ryan Reed

Woods

Live at Third Man Records

THIRD MAN

Even though countless live tapes and bootlegs have been in circulation for years (one such tape available through mail-order tape trade only) *Live at Third Man Records* is, quite surprisingly, **Woods**' first proper live album. It's also one that comes at an interesting juncture for the Brooklyn freak-folk jamband: Their ninth and latest studio album, *City Sun Eater in the River of Light*, signaled a full departure from their primitive lo-fi days and marked a full realization of what has been a gradual progression toward a more polished, studio-friendly sound. Recorded at Third Man Records' Nashville studio this past May before an intimate, invite-only audience, *Live at Third Man* offers a selection of Woods' more radio-ready numbers from their vast and deep catalog. While songs like "Morning Light" and "Hollow Home" put on display Woods' more recent Americana-driven sound, others, like "Sun City Creeps" and the 10-minute version of "The Take"—both of which feature the addition of an Ethiopian-jazz-inspired horn section—pivot toward the band's primal, improv side. Despite their prolific studio output, at heart and from their very beginnings as an abstract, improvisational, living-room recording project, Woods has always been a live band. And, on *Live at Third Man*, it becomes immediately apparent as to why. *Sam Davis*

Ross Hammond & Sameer Gupta

Upward PRESCOTT

Ross Hammond is a wide-ranging California guitarist. Hammond's recordings have moved confidently from rubbery electric-funk to gleaming Frippertronics and on into country blues and beyond. His versatility doesn't interfere with the sensitivity that comes through in his playing in these varied settings. On his latest, Hammond—playing 12-string acoustic guitar with lots of slide—has paired up with tabla player **Sameer Gupta** for an album of largely improvised duo pieces. The two have known each other and played together for decades. Fans of creative guitarists like Glenn Jones, Michael Hedges and John Fahey will appreciate Hammond's rich tone, his control and his willingness to fly in unexpected directions. The recordings of John McLaughlin's Shakti might come to mind, but Hammond and Gupta are doing something less tethered to tradition here. There's not a lot of harmonic movement, with most of the tracks hovering in a mode. Sometimes Hammond picks away at a resonating arpeggiation as Gupta circles around the beat, executing fluttering and crisp flourishes while snapping the rhythm into place with the liquid boom of the lower drum, or toggling between a three- and four-beat pulsation. Melodic energies seem subservient to texture, rhythm and coloristic concerns. But tracks like "Farm to Table" have a kind of jazzy post-bop chromatic density.

John Adamian

Billy Childs

Rebirth MACK AVENUE

The last time jazz piano virtuoso **Billy Childs** released an album as a leader was in 2014, when he paid tribute to singer-songwriter Laura Nyro for the length of *Map to the Treasure*, which earned Childs his fourth Grammy for his arrangement of the track "New York Tendaberry." Now he is signed to a new label and he's using that occasion, in a sense, to pay tribute to himself 40 years after making his recording debut as part of a group led by trombonist J.J. Johnson. Three of the tracks on the sublime and appropriately titled *Rebirth* are updates of original tunes that Childs first cut for his own early albums. The opening "Backwards Bop" is given a grander and more nuanced reading, while "The Starry Night" is packed with drama and daring. Much of the credit for the album's thrill factor must, of course, be shared with the exemplary cast of collaborators, including drummer **Eric Harland**, a master of subtlety, and bassist **Hans Glawischnig**, who stretches in unexpected, quite welcomed ways. Saxophonist **Steve Wilson** is another ideal team player with his bold alto runs, particularly on the cover of Michel Legrand's "The Windmills of Your Mind," pushing Childs further and further without ever losing sight of the core melody. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Father John Misty

The Octopus Project

Moon Duo

Occult Architecture Vol. 1

SACRED BONES

On their fourth album—*Occult Architecture Vol. 1*—Oregon's **Moon Duo** find themselves in a synthier cove of the noise-pop archipelago. Pushing into territory where fans of their earliest albums might think about getting off the proverbial bus, songs like "Will of the Devil" and "Cold Fear" have **Sanae Yamada**'s keyboards and **Ripley Johnson**'s guitar starting to sound like separate instruments, instead of melting together into saturation, overtones and riotous energy swells. Since 2010, the two have found remarkable versatility in their combination of *Arc/Weld*-era Neil Young fuzz, Yamada's surf-kraut feels, and a handclap-friendly pop aesthetic that made albums like 2012's *Circles* simultaneously heavy and playful. Continuing their mission of head-spinning modern psychedelia, paradoxically, the increasing emphasis on synth tones makes the band sound less effortlessly transcendent and more human. The first of two volumes—darkness and light, naturally—the search for new places on *Occult Architecture Vol. 1* finds success in the urgency of "Cross-Town Fade," a bouncing keyboard figure springing off the beat while Johnson gets his swirl on. But in long dabs on the opening "Death Set," plinky between-verse fills on "Cult of Moloch," laser blurps in "Creepin'" and elsewhere, the keyboards feel less cosmic than interruptive, with stray radio waves bending their way into familiar signals. *Jesse Jarnow*

The Kentucky Headhunters

On Safari PLOWBOY

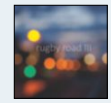
With a storied history that dates back nearly 50 years and 10 albums, **The Kentucky Headhunters** may be the last survivors among the original vanguard of Southern-rock warriors—a select group that once counted the Allman Brothers Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd and others who drew their style and inspiration from below the Mason-Dixon Line. *On Safari* is classic Southern rock, as evidenced by such roughshod rockers as "Beaver Creek Mansion," "Caught in a Dream," "Big Time" and the aptly named "Deep South Blues Again." Yet, while most of the music is monolithic in that regard, a few of the songs press ahead with more melodic intent, and certain tracks, like the rollicking "Jukebox Full of Blues," the loping "God Loves a Rolling Stone" and the sturdy, mid-tempo "Lowdown Memphis Town Blues" find the band focused on a streamlined sound. Those are momentary respites, however; far more typical is the gruff, growling vocal pinned to a song such as "Crazy Jim," which brings that Southern machismo front and center. In essence, The Kentucky Headhunters sound like a band out of time, a holdover from a long-gone era when the cultural divide was a lot clearer and rock-and-roll was less concerned with nuance and more focused on the ability to rally the masses through robust riffing and the silent strums of so many air guitars. Ultimately, this safari explores familiar terrain, but it's a spirited pursuit all the same.

Lee Zimmerman

OFF THE TRACKS

Rugby Road

III WYD?



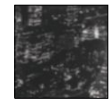
Philadelphia-based **Rugby Road** have been playing together for over 25 years—in the same trio configuration the whole time, impressively—but their studio output has only consisted of two full-length LPs and, now, a new four-track EP, *III*, their first release since 2011's *Different Degrees*. The group, which gained notoriety with their frequent appearances at famed New York jam club Wetlands, has spent the ensuing years playing regular shows together while pursuing lives outside of music, staying somewhat under the radar before their return to the studio with *III*. The brief collection highlights a mature songwriting and playing style cultivated during almost three decades together, kicking off with opening track "Back to You," which recalls classic Springsteen in its melodies and harmonies, complemented by **Kenny Kearns**' earthen vocals and **Derek Smith**'s full guitar. The tune also explores jammier territory with an almost Latin groove that kicks in near the end—powered by **Rich Pruett**'s punchy drums—setting the stage for the rest of the album, which serves as a quick refresher on the talent and range of these guys. Following track "Nobody (Needs to Know)" gives Smith full rein for an extended solo over a well-established groove, while "Spoken For" adds a touch of slow-burn grunge to the mix. Closing tune "Give It Away" rounds out the EP with a lilting pace that gives way to soaring guitar that seems to lead the listener toward the horizon before the album's soft final landing.

Matt Inman

Timber Timbre

Sincerely, Future Pollution

CITY SLANG



Taylor Kirk, the singer-songwriter and centerpiece of **Timber Timbre**, carries a similar appeal to David Lynch:

Guy Lowndes (Father John Misty)

His work is willfully weird and offbeat, but it speaks frankly about the human condition. The world got a quietly compelling taste of Timber Timbre with the group's self-titled third record in 2009, but 2014's *Hot Dreams* broadcast Kirk's oddball, widescreen vision with saxophones and trembling crescendos. With sixth album *Sincerely, Future Pollution*, Kirk creates a more immersive atmosphere than ever before. Whereas previous albums let wide-open silences create unnerving tension, this nine-track collection shades in Kirk's songwriting with washes of '80s-inspired synthesizers. Timber Timbre already shared a spooky aesthetic with science-fiction celebrations like *Stranger Things*. (The band's fourth album was even called *Creep on Creepin' On*.) With *Future Pollution*, Kirk drapes his songs with dark, sprawling and pulsing arrangements. He even puts his low, enigmatic voice aside to go full-on sci-fi soundtrack with the shadowy, grimy instrumental "Skin Tone" and the throbbing, mechanic chug of "Bleu Nuit." Timber Timbre toys with robot funk on "Grifting," as interlocking synth lines squelch and squirm and Kirk's lyrics fit like jigsaw puzzle pieces: "Faking into making, never give but taking/ Building trust through kindness, to exploit the finest/ Walls and bridges burning, time and table turning." *Sincerely, Future Pollution* isn't the masterpiece that *Hot Dreams* was; you'll need to parse through a lot of steel and glass to find the haunting humanity that once defined Timber Timbre. But listen closer. This one will creep on you. ***Justin Jacobs***

The Octopus Project

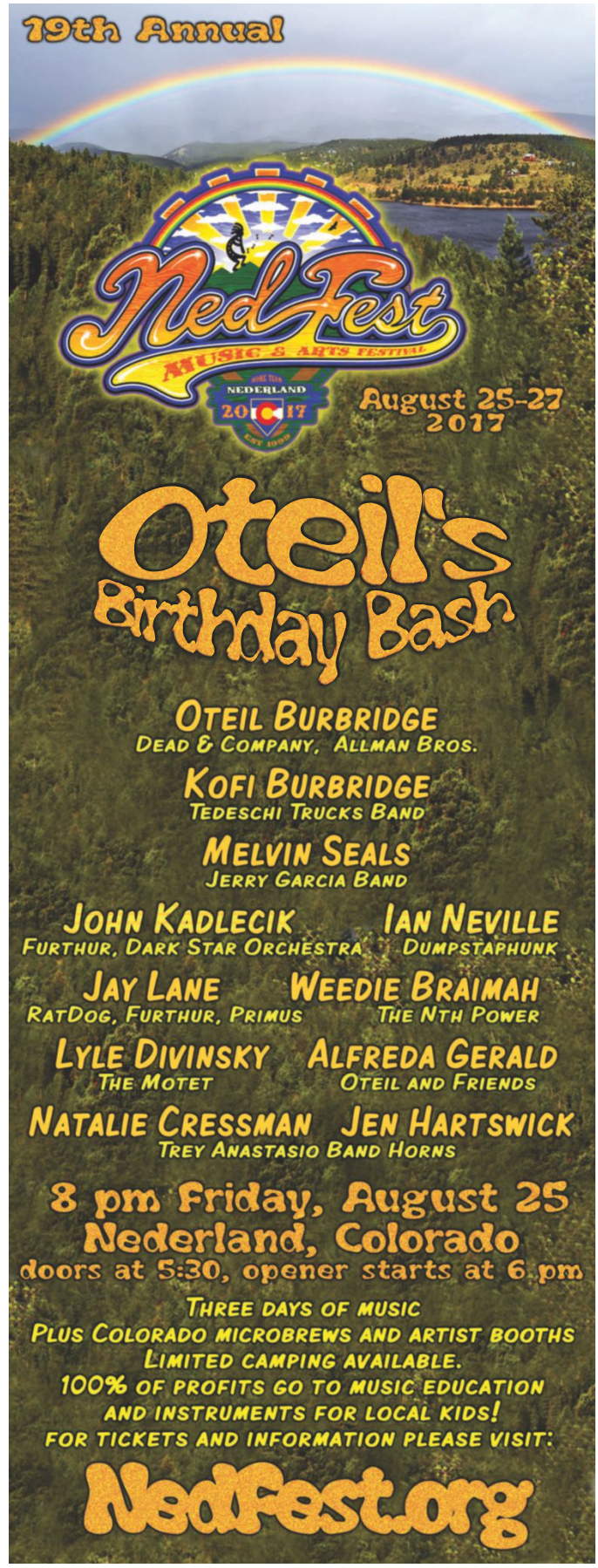
Memory Mirror ROBOT HIGH SCHOOL

Austin's **Octopus Project** continues to demolish our expectations of what a rock band can be. Fractured dance rhythms, post-rock clatter, mysterious theremin stabs, jazzy cocktail-lounge ambience and experimental electro textures continue to swirl through the mix in unexpected combinations and permutations. There are even a few *songs*, although they play havoc with traditional verse/chorus structure in favor of something more fractured and psychedelic, a lyrical equivalent of their erratic instrumental approach. "Small Hundred" is a minimal track that blends old school disco and rap into a breezy confection full of processed vocals and incomprehensible lyrics. A complex, off-center, Afrobeat-influenced pulse, intergalactic theremin textures and echoing, dub heavy vocals explore the beautiful melody of "Remember Remembering" before floating off into a long instrumental passage that would be fitting background music for a sci-fi romance. "Understanding Fruit" inches close to a regular rock instrumental with a driving, propulsive bassline spinning through a whirlpool of guitars and xylophones that provide brief stabs of melody. A murky Bo Diddley beat submerged under waves of synthesizer slurry, foghorn bleating, fractured drum rhythms and funereal organ drives "Ledgeridge," while "Brounce" features distorted, metallic guitars floating over sustained synthesizer chords, ambient, unintelligible vocals and a club-friendly dance beat. The murky mix the band favors is full of impenetrable sounds and challenging rhythms that often obscure as much as they illuminate, making it hard to discern individual voices and instruments. It's an overwhelming approach that's stimulating and frustrating in equal amounts. ***J. Poet***

Father John Misty

Pure Comedy SUB POP

Since 2012, **Father John Misty** has been indie rock's most fascinating enigma. When Ryan Adams grew out of his bratty and brilliant persona, Misty (or **Joshua Tillman**) picked up the torch—he's serious but self-effacing, making headlines for hilariously trolling artists and delivering cultural diatribes onstage. However, his own records, debut *Fear Fun* and 2015's *I Love You, Honeybear*, consist of honest, affecting, if at times sinister, folk tunes. Disdaining pop culture while creating his own love-it-or-leave-it art has painted him as a modern-day Lou Reed. With third album *Pure Comedy*, Father John Misty goes all in—there hasn't been a rock record this unabashedly self-aware and critical of modern life in years. There's only one problem with *Pure Comedy*, but it's hard to skip over. While his lyrics have never been more acerbic, his songcraft doesn't match up. Most songs strike the same hushed, string-laden, low-tempo shuffle; with 13 tracks in about 75 minutes, *Pure Comedy* meanders too often through the mist. And yet, the album is impossible to ignore. On the title track, Tillman dismantles man's self-importance, smirking with unbelievable clarity and a lilting, piano-led arrangement. "Their religions are the best. They worship themselves, but they're totally obsessed with risen zombies, celestial virgins, magic tricks. They get terribly upset if you question their sacred texts, written by woman-hating epileptics," he sings. On the 13-minute "Leaving LA," he sets himself aflame: "Oh, great, that's just what they all need—another white guy in 2017 who takes himself so goddamn seriously." Lyrically, *Pure Comedy* is pure gold. But even the most word-driven folk can benefit from a surgeon's knife. With a little editing, the album could've been magnificent.
Justin Jacobs



Plundering the Vaults

Grateful Dead

Grateful Dead: 50th Anniversary Deluxe Edition RHINO

First, can we please, once and for all, stop saying that the **Grateful Dead**'s debut album is weak? For some of us, it's just about perfect and always has been. Yes, they were out of their minds when they made it; it often lacks depth and sounds like someone sped up the tapes; it's not big on nuance, even "Morning Dew" is rushed. But this is who they were during their first couple of years. If you ever needed to explain to someone what LSD sounded like, then all you had to do was crank "Viola Lee Blues" to full volume and let nature (and **Jerry Garcia**) take its course. Disc one of this 50th anniversary edition is the album remastered. It still rocks like crazy, and you either love it by now or, well, poor you. But the real draw here is disc two, a full live gig (plus a few extra tracks) from July 1966 in Vancouver. It's a revelation in so many ways, especially since high-quality recordings of complete early gigs are so rare. Here are the formative Dead at both their most incendiary/innovative and their sloppiest. (*This* "Viola" is a freakin' mess.) The band was clearly still figuring out what exactly they could and couldn't pull off: blues, check; sizzling garage-rock, check; folk-rock, got it; chaos, oh yeah, and if they sometimes stumbled, they made up for it in enthusiasm. Garcia is still about two parts ambition to one part chops, but **Bill Kreutzmann** and **Phil Lesh** prove to be one of the toughest rhythm sections in town. **Bob Weir** comes off as the kid he is ("New, New Minglewood Blues"—egads!) and **Pigpen** is all bravado and cool. They would not stay in this place much longer so, as a document—there are several songs here that never made it to official albums—it's priceless. As a musical experience, it's flawed and loads of fun. That it happened more than a half-century ago is mind-boggling. *Jeff Tamarkin*

George Harrison

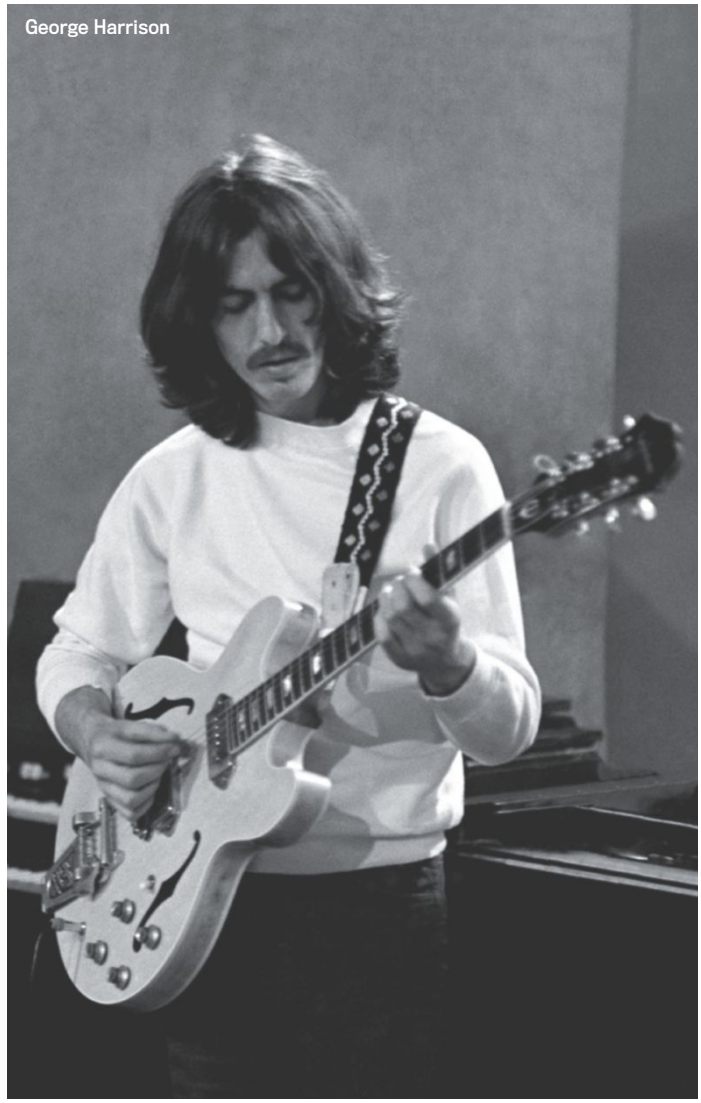
George Harrison: The Vinyl Collection UNIVERSAL

Most hardcore Beatles fans agree that **George Harrison**'s *All Things Must Pass*, released mere months after the band's world-shaking breakup in 1970, is the best solo album ever made by an ex-Beatle. (And any who don't should probably rethink their position.) For the guy who was always tagged as the "quiet" member of the Fab Four, he made quite a loud and definitive statement right out of the gate, and he cranked out a lot of music during the ensuing decade before his self-imposed hiatus in 1983.

From there, it would be easy, almost quaint, to cast Harrison's later work in the light of his success with the Traveling Wilburys, the hit-making supergroup he founded in 1988 with Bob Dylan, Roy Orbison, Tom Petty and **Jeff Lynne**. Interestingly, Harrison was the (quietly) driving force behind the group, whose smash single "Handle with Care" was originally intended as the B-side to Harrison's own "This Is Love," from his 1987 "comeback" album, *Cloud Nine*.

What emerges most plainly from the Wilburys experience is that, for Harrison, friendship and a deep awareness of how collaboration could spark the creative process were all-important starting points for making good music. The notion probably had its roots in Harrison's attraction to the spiritual teachings of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi—but whatever the source, it informed just about every solo album he ever released. Even his obscure *Electronic Sound*, recorded on a Moog modular synthesizer in late 1968, couldn't have happened without the input of synth expert **Bernie Krause** (who later sued Harrison for the privilege, proving once again that some friendships just aren't built to last).

So what's the point of rehashing all this? Well, with the recent resurgence of the vinyl LP—the one format which, however nostalgically and romantically, still enables a gather-round-the-turntable sense of community—the timing is perfect to give Harrison's catalog the full treatment. From *All Things Must Pass* to *Live in Japan* to the posthumously released *Brainwashed*, all of Harrison's music seems to matter even more when it's shared.



George Harrison

"Friends are all souls that we've known in other lives," Harrison said in *I, Me, Mine*, the hefty tome of lyrics, photos and interview excerpts that served as his autobiography when it was first published in 1980, and is now available again in an expanded edition to celebrate what would have been Harrison's 74th birthday. "We're drawn to each other. Even if I have only known them for a day, it doesn't matter. I'm not going to wait until I've known them two years because, anyway, we have met somewhere before." And we can say the same for his music. *Bill Murphy*

Phish

St. Louis '93 JEMP

This 6-CD set captures **Phish** in the midst of a period of great growth. Across two visits to St. Louis' American Theater—one in April of 1993 and the other four months later—the band is displayed here as a musically tight, endearingly ambitious unit whose creativity is gaining steady force and is almost ready to burst the dam.

Phish was growing exponentially at the time, both as a creative force and a commercial one. The year before, the band played two shows at a brick box of a club in St. Louis called Mississippi Nights. For this visit, Phish had graduated to an august Beaux-Arts-style theater with twice the seating capacity. The two shows here are best heard straight through, as the band shows itself in fighting trim and bursting with energy. Try the door-slammer of a "Runaway Jim" from April 14, which sounds powered by rocket fuel, or the explosive "Axilla" show opener from August 16, during which each band member sounds like he's out for blood. That August show is not an obvious pick from a summer tour in which Phish did much to outline the aesthetic that would mark its finest years. You can hear the group not quite breaking through into the improvisational heights it would reach the next year, but nevertheless straining at the boundaries of song form. "Possum" features advanced experiments in tension and release, repeatedly caving in on itself only to explode back into full force as **Trey Anastasio** spews flurries of 16th notes. Both "Mike's Song" and a thrilling "Weekapaug Groove" feature unusually open jams, even if neither fully expands into one of the fragmented song suites for which this summer tour is best remembered. *St. Louis '93* is the sound of a young band on the hunt, closing quickly behind the big game on the horizon.

Jeremy D. Goodwin

DEAD RELICS By Jesse Jarnow

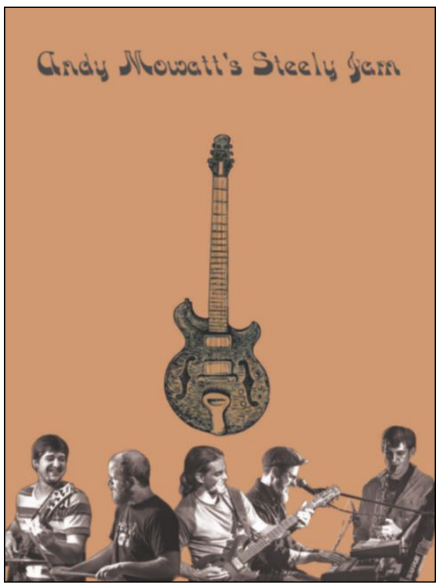
Grateful Dead
Dave's Picks, Vol. 22: Felt Forum, New York, NY, 12/7/71
GRATEFUL DEAD/RHINO

Jerry Garcia Band
GarciaLive, Vol. 8: Bradley Center, Milwaukee, WI, 11/23/91
ROUND/ATO

Jerry Garcia Band

Sometimes dismissed by Deadheads as a musically conservative year for the **Grateful Dead**–both for the departure of second drummer **Mickey Hart** and the band's ongoing turn from frothing psychedelia to a more stripped-down sound–1971 found the group's sense of adventure hiding out in what **Jerry Garcia** called "a regular shoot-'em-up saloon band." And on the 22nd installment of Dave's Picks–recorded December 7 (and 6), at the Felt Forum, adjacent to Madison Square Garden–it's that sense of adventure that's still clearly driving the group-mind, even if it doesn't manifest in the form of exploratory jams. Building sets around new material debuted over the previous 12 months and played nearly every night, the band is still tweaking the soon-classic *Europe '72* numbers (from the vocal arrangement of "Jack Straw" to the tempo of "Tennessee Jed"), and breaking in new keyboardist **Keith Godchaux** (who gets deeply moody on a 13-minute version of "Smokestack Lighting"). Cracking through into the mainstream that season with a hit self-titled double LP and a series of radio broadcasts, *Dave's Picks, Vol. 22* is the sound of a new generation of Deadheads being born. Recorded almost exactly 20 years later, *GarciaLive, Vol. 8* documents the classic late-period iteration of Garcia's gospel-driven *other* band. Gigging in the same arenas as the Dead by the early '90s, the **Jerry Garcia Band** feels comparably sleek, freed from double-drummer chaos, lead bass and other anachronisms of Garcia's day job. With Garcia belting loud and confident atop the Jerryettes, **Gloria Jones** and **Jaclyn LaBranch** (all blurred with a wee dab of reverb), and sheltered in the warm churchly bed of **Melvin Seals**' B3 organ, the Garcia Band floats free, both sacred and casual. The purity of "My Sisters and Brothers" hangs easily next to the hustle of Garcia and Robert Hunter's "Cats Under the Stars" because when the lyrics end and Garcia's ever-lyrical guitar picks up, the truth can be found in both (and especially in the first officially released live version of "Rubin and Cherise"). Garcia's voice might wheeze and the synths might ground the music in the late 20th century, but it's not a sense of adventure powering the band so much as Garcia's musical charisma, and its fidelity comes through true and high.

Bob Minkin (Jerry Garcia Band)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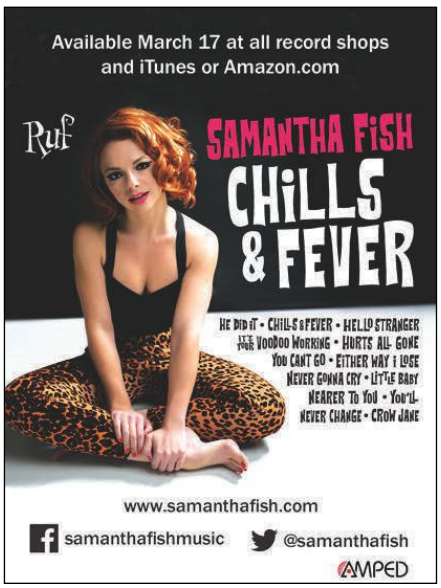
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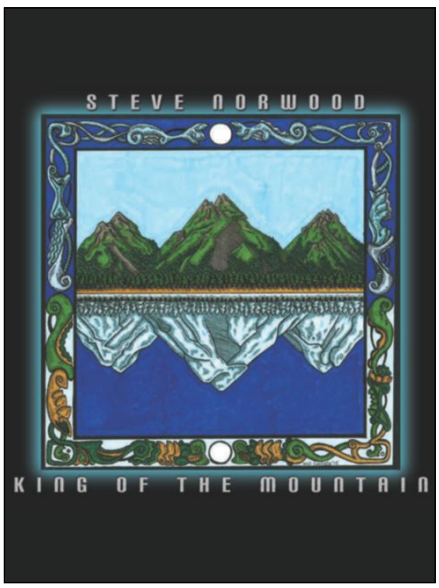
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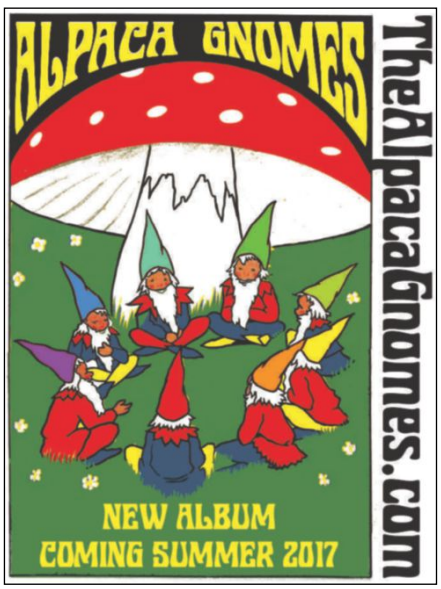
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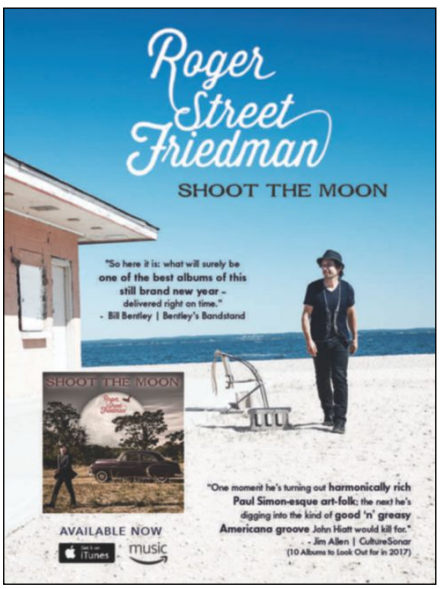
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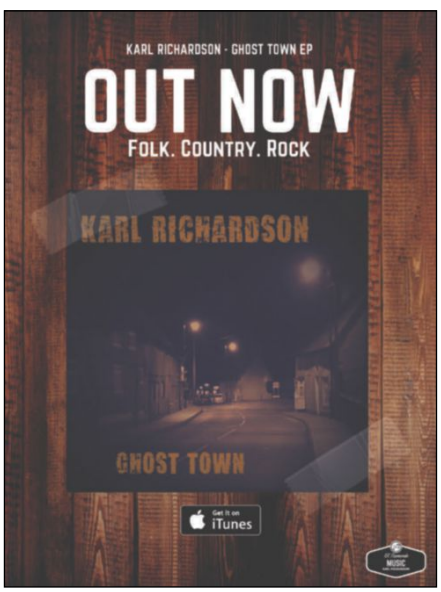
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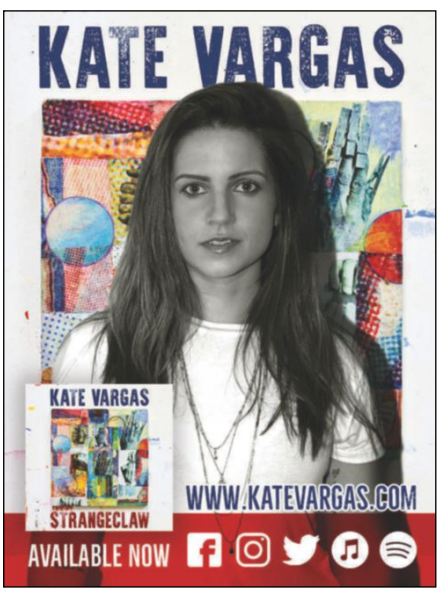
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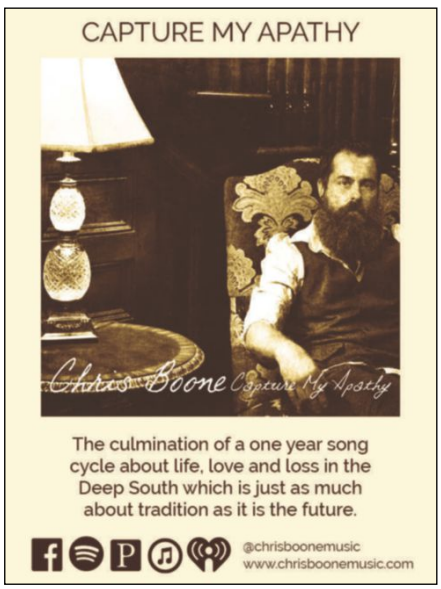

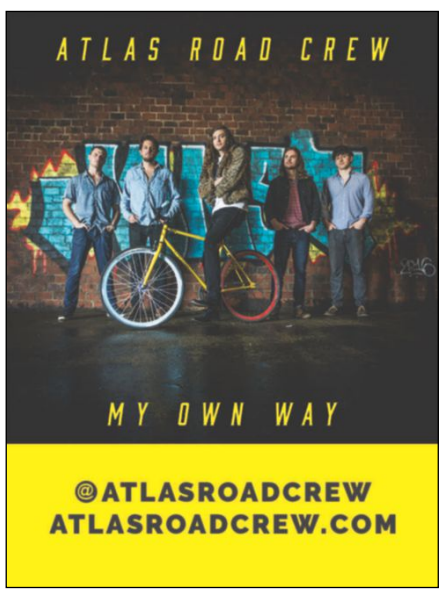

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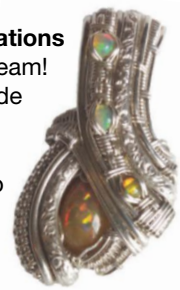

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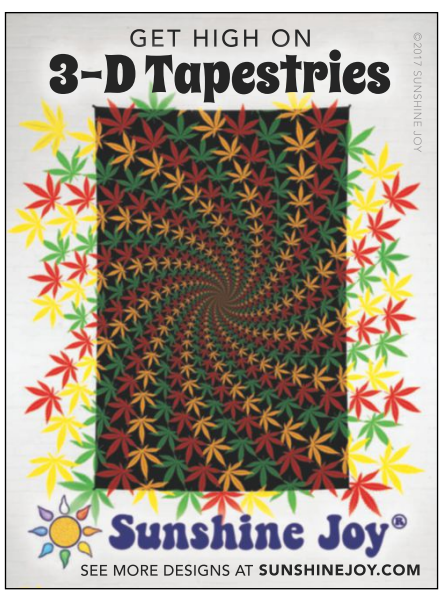

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five to 10 years is too high-definition or too lit up. It just doesn't feel like an actual show—it feels like a Walmart. You can just tell the musicians aren't comfortable. I wanted this film to feel like any other night onstage, and the offstage footage to feel comfortable, like you're on the road. And part of that was that the film crew just lived with us for a bit. You get to the point where you're not really thinking about it a whole lot, and they're sneaky with the cameras—you don't feel like you're in a reality show. It was more about the conversations, not what we wanted it to look like.

CARRYING THE TORCH

We are still working on the Mad Dogs film from Lockn'. We're trying to spread the word and get things financed. That can be a beast, but I would love to get this thing out there. It's some of the last really strong footage of Leon. From our end, we just think it's important to get it out there, and we are down to volunteer our involvement. Something certainly happened to the band while we were rehearsing for that show. It gave us a bit of confidence in a way—it's OK to carry this powerful tradition and powerful music on. It's appreciated and it's necessary and it needs to be played with the right care and love. And that's what this band was tailor-made for. You don't have to shy away from it.

There was a spirit and energy that came out of doing that show that is very real and that was pivotal for the group. We first really connected with Leon when he opened for us at the Beacon a few years ago. We asked him to do "Space Captain" with us, and his guys were like, "He's not really into sitting in for the most part." But when he saw us soundchecking, a light bulb went off and he was into it. From that moment on, he was a great champion of our group. There are songs we throw in now, every few shows, as a remembrance of Leon, Leonard Cohen and B.B. King—these amazing people we were lucky enough to have a real, personal, musical connection with. When those torches are passed to you or left there, you've got to pick them up and carry them. From one torch, you can light a lot of others. We feel like it's part of our job to keep that music fresh in people's minds.

"STATESBORO BLUES"

[Butch Trucks' suicide] was a shocking, dark situation. You're just fucking sideswiped—no one saw any of that stuff coming, so it was, and still is, a lot to unpack. My dad, Butch's brother, was on the road with me when it happened.

He was just shocked and pissed off. You have all these emotions and you just don't know how to process them. The day after he died, we were at soundcheck in St. Louis and I'm thinking, "How do you process this? You're gonna run into a thousand people that are gonna want to talk about it or acknowledge it." I just stood there onstage, having stood underneath Butch and Jaimoe's two kits for so many years, and looked back at the two drums we have in our band. That's the first time it really hit me.

Earlier that day, I was thinking of tunes to play for Butch, and I kept coming back to the first tune I ever played with Butch when I was 9 or 10 years old. Gregg Allman, Butch, Warren Haynes and Allen Woody all came out to Tropics International, this little club I was playing in South Florida, and they got up and we did "Statesboro Blues." Then, when I was 14 or 15, I went out and toured with Gregg in his solo band. Some of that stuff feels like a lifetime ago. It's hard to imagine it happening 'cause they were all so crazy in that period. [*Laughs.*] Not everyone was all adult and clean. So I thought we should open the show with "Statesboro Blues"—the first tune I ever played with him. That's just the quintessential Butch shuffle. It's also the first tune on *At Fillmore East*—the first tune that a lot of people heard of the Allman Brothers—and it seemed right.

It was tough to play that first night without thinking about it too much, and after we played "Statesboro" during soundcheck, I looked up and saw that my dad had split. My first thought was, "Shit, does he think that's in poor taste?" I didn't know if I had offended him but, when he heard that music and he heard that sound, that's the first time that it just came crashing home. It was an emotional gig and, really, it still felt fresh every gig after that, leading up to the Savannah, Ga., show a few days later. It felt appropriate on that run to just acknowledge it every night, and, in Savannah, we started the show the same way. We also did "Liz Reed," thinking about the other aspect of his playing—the extended part of it. It was cathartic, in a way, but it also was just a nod to what people remember him by.

NEW TEDESCHI TRUCKS TRACKS

Our next album is still in the writing phase. We went in a few months ago on a break and spent two or three days just writing and getting ideas down, so there's definitely some stuff there. We're ready to get back in. We're planning in the next month or so to spend another three or four days writing tunes. That'll probably lead very quickly into recording. So we're on the edge of the active phase of making a record. We just have to find the time between tours.

after the initial recordings, credits Kaye's undying passion for the record with keeping it alive for over 10 years. "Jessi allowed Lenny to do whatever he pleased, which speaks volumes to his creative instinct and the trust that exists between them," he says. "You don't see that often with artists and their producers. Lenny was Jessi's shepherd—there to serve her and her exquisite performances—and he did so with extreme care and conviction."

* * *

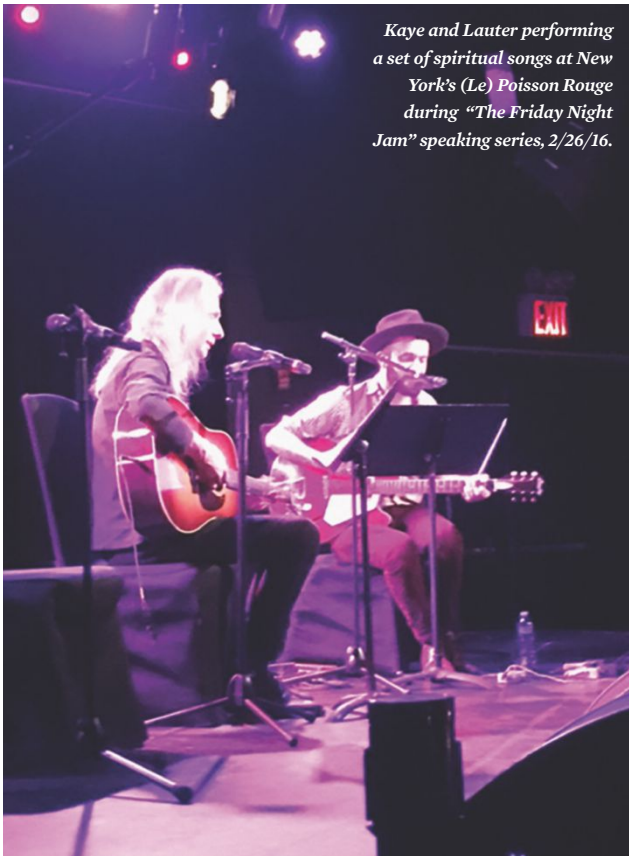
JUST A FEW WEEKS AFTER UNVEILING *The Psalms*, Colter is also set to release her memoir, *An Outlaw and a Lady,* fittingly around the spring holidays of Easter and Passover. *An Outlaw and a Lady* offers a candid account of Colter's life and music, as well as Jennings' struggles with addiction and how he eventually found his faith shortly before his passing. The experience has allowed Colter to revisit her art in a new, honest way.

"This book has made me think about how, in life, you hold on to what you begin with," she says. "I was just thinking about that this morning because, in service, my mother would move from one song to another. Sometimes, she'd stop and announce it: 'Well, let's turn to page 138,' but it wasn't as disciplined as in some of the other religious forms. It was this free-flowing thing, and that was part of my life. I recently saw Bob Dylan, and he does the same thing. I got to speak with him, and I said, 'You do your show like you've been raised in church,' and he said, 'Well, I have!'"

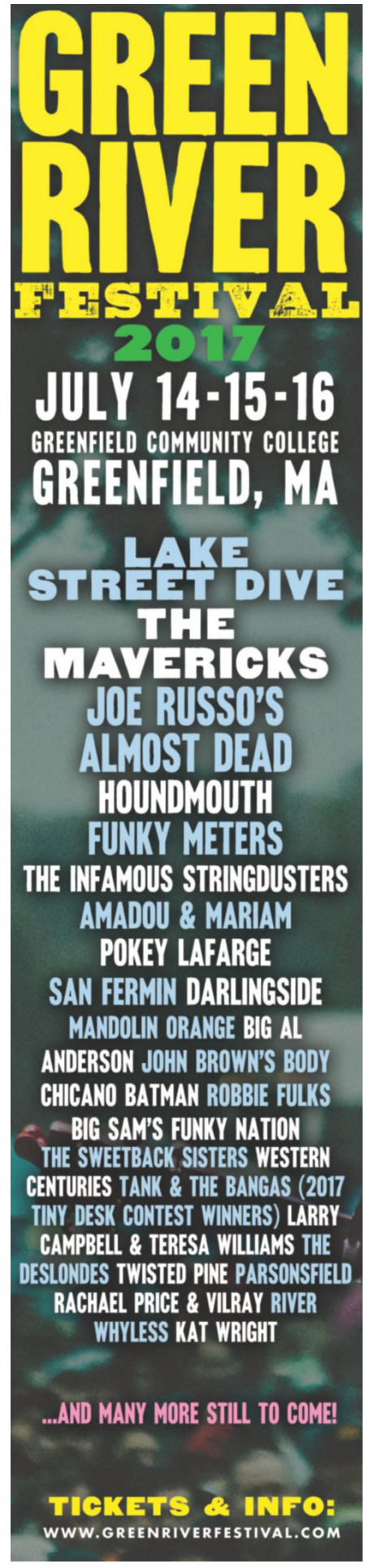
Kaye has also had time to reflect on his singular journey from St. Mark's Church, where he first backed Patti Smith for a set of poetry in 1971, to his current role as a septuagenarian and an elder statesman in the indie and alternative communities. Last year, he became a grandfather for the first time, and he recently visited his daughter and her twin boys in Oxford, Miss., an area he admits he's never spent much time in but is interested in exploring. This past December both he and Smith celebrated their 70th birthdays onstage, within a few days of each other, alongside members of the Patti Smith Group. Kaye, who was born in New York and raised in the city's outer boroughs, marked the milestone at New York's Bowery Ballroom with the help of Blue Öyster Cult's Albert Bouchard. Then, they moved the party to Smith's Chicago hometown for a show at the Riviera Theatre with special guest Michael Stipe. A few days before dropping the long-awaited *Psalms*, Kaye offered another devotional performance at Carnegie Hall during his annual stop at the Tibet House Benefit Concert.

Both Colter and Kaye believe they'll take elements of *The Psalms* with them as they move on to new projects. In addition to a few appearances together as part of the album's rollout, Colter has opened some of her own recent shows with "Psalm 23." She's also brought her divine songbook into some curious settings through her work with her son Shooter, who has drifted between outlaw country, psychedelia and hard rock during his prolific career.

"I've gone out to LA and had Shooter say, 'Mom, you need to come over to this cool event I'm having.' He doesn't tell me that it's Marilyn Manson's musicians, and they're playing with me," she says with a laugh. "They call what I do 'so real.' I say, 'I don't know what that means!' But I have such fun playing with him. So I don't know what the future holds. But I'm here to tell you, I'm in the world of surprises."



Kaye and Lauter performing a set of spiritual songs at New York's (Le) Poisson Rouge during "The Friday Night Jam" speaking series, 2/26/16.



Bar-Lev envisioned the project as a collective venture in the same way that the band's longtime publicist, Dennis McNally, comments in the film that the essence of the Grateful Dead also encompassed the audience.

"There's a lot of home movies in this, too," Bar-Lev notes. "We sent out a call for submissions to Deadheads on the Dead's social media, and that yielded a bunch of great Super 8 content from the '80s, which I love because it really gives color to the experience of being a Deadhead in the '80s."

Long Strange Trip premiered at this year's Sundance Film Festival and, prior to one of the screenings, an event took place that resonated deeply with the director. "This was a moment that reminded me of what I love about Grateful Dead shows," he explains. "I wasn't there, but on the fourth night, a guy drove all the way in from Denver and proposed to his girlfriend at the podium right before it started. That really brought tears to my eyes to hear that because it was beyond my wildest dreams really, that people would consider this a gathering worthy of proposing to your girlfriend."

Amazon Studios acquired *Long Strange Trip* and will release the documentary in May.

Can you talk about your initial connection to the Grateful Dead?

I got into the Grateful Dead as a 13 year old. I grew up in the Bay Area. I was first introduced through tapes, and then I started seeing shows in the mid-'80s. Those of us who got into the Dead in the '80s found a sanctuary from some of the more superficial aspects of the culture at the time. It wasn't just great music, you also had a sense that you were not being performed *at*. For a while, it ruined other bands for me. Once you've been to a Grateful Dead concert, and then somebody's saying, "Hello, Cleveland!" and doing that kind of schmaltzy rock-and-roll stuff, you see it for what it is—a piece of showbiz.

Amir Bar-Lev

Since then, the culture has gotten only more superficial. So one of the reasons for making the film was to try and make a record of what rock-and-roll can be and what music can be, for teenagers today and into the future, so that they know what life was like before we were all filming everything with our iPhones—before every rock act had a brand tie-in, and all those other things that have gotten in the way of music appreciation.

Was there any particular film that served as a lodestar for you along the way?

We turned as much to TV shows like *The Wire* as we did to other music documentaries for inspiration. *The Wire* has a constellation of different perspectives, and none of them are sacrosanct. If you want to get at the truth, you have to occupy these complementary points of view, which, at many times, are in competition with one another. That seems like a great model for how to make a film about the Grateful Dead, which is really a conversation between a bunch of different people, and not all of them agree at any one moment. I wanted it to feel like moving through seasons of *The Wire*. When you're with McNulty, he seems like the protagonist. Then, when you're with the guys who are in opposition to him, you think McNulty is a lunatic. And, in both cases, you're right.

The Grateful Dead is a collective. It's everything from Jerry—who said, "Once I'm done with the music, I don't care what happens with it," and was fundamentally committed to the immediate moment—to the tapers, who were committed to posterity. You could see those two things as being at odds with one another, or you could see them as complementing one another. I'm in the latter camp.

To this end, one memorable sequence involves Jerry's resistance to a band statement encouraging Deadheads to police themselves in the lots.

Jerry's mistrust of ideology is not because he didn't want to see the same change in the world that many of us do, and it's not because he didn't believe that there was a right and wrong. I certainly didn't know him, but from listening to all these interviews, I feel like he had a pretty anti-authoritarian view on morality, which was that any morality that was inculcated top-down wasn't liable to stick. So if, for example, Deadheads wanted people to stop gate-crashing, they should be encouraged to effect that change themselves.

Robert Hunter makes a cameo appearance in the film, which seems like it occurred spontaneously. How did that come about?

I went through years of petitioning him—petitioning people he knows—and was preparing for him to be a cipher in the film. I would ask people on camera whether or not they thought I could get him and why he didn't want to be on camera, and I almost satisfied myself that his absence could be made to work for the film. But then, while we were interviewing Bob Weir, he offered to call Hunter and bring us over there that very evening. And the result—I'll leave to the audience to see.

You utilize photography a particular way in the film. What was your approach?

I wanted the animation to be psychedelic but in an analog way—stories within stories. I wanted to acknowledge the people who had taken the photos, so that contact sheets, grease pencils and the process of documenting the Dead's journey was part of what we were playing with and showing the audience.

Beyond footage of the band, *Frankenstein* serves an important thematic role.

Jerry says that watching *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* as a 6 year old was one of the seminal moments in his life. He says that it was a year after his dad died, and "it was the fact of the dead thing brought back to life. It terrified me." Later, he says that another huge epiphany happened when he went to see the Watts Towers after the Watts Acid Tests. He says, "I don't want to make something that's here when I'm gone. I think I'd rather have fun." On some level, in both cases, Jerry is asking, I think, "How does something become immortal? Is it by electrocuting a corpse? Building a monument?" One of the questions of the film is about how to make something that's built to last—and whether it's a good idea to make something that's built to last.

up with in Sedona. It was funny: Before it really had lyrics, the vibe of it was heading more in the direction of a G. Love song, with some rap vocals and a mid-tempo funk beat. But then, Keith was like, "No, I really, really want to try it more like a full-on country thing." Keith wanted to bring in Tyler [Grant] and have somebody who could really slay it on the Telecaster, as this beautiful country thing.

So, although when we first started recording, I was like, "Oh, we're gonna do this G. Love thing," when we decided to go more country with it, it was off to the races in that direction. We've always been joking with Keith that he should try to sell a bunch of his songs to these songwriters in Nashville, and this was our ode to that: just full-on, unabridged country guitar. But, at the same time, the underpinnings of the song are completely different.

KH: Keith is my favorite vocalist in the band, and his lyrics always make sense. My lyrics are like, "Oh, I kind of understand that line and that made sense, and then you've lost me about halfway through." Keith has a storyline to his writing, so I really appreciate not only his vocals, but his lyrics.

STOP DROP ROLL

KH: This was a silly song that I wrote with Jason [Hann]. It was written as a party song in the summer. One of the interesting parts of it was my collaboration with Jason, but I only envisioned playing it for a few months. We recorded it for the fun of it and then we decided that we needed that vibe on the album.

It started out as a little riff that I had been playing in my solo band, and I got the whole audience to do it. I was like, "That's kind of hooky." So I said, "How about this?" And we developed the entire song from that one little intro riff. Jason has been excited to be more involved in the songwriting process and he latched onto it. He put some drum beats to it and he helped write the lyrics.

"Stop Drop Roll" is one of the songs that we've been playing live for a little while. People in the band have different ideas about whether to play these songs before the album comes out. It doesn't matter to me personally what the order is. I just like getting music out. In our case, it came down to figuring out what songs made sense to play live, and songs like "Stop Drop Roll" or "Get Tight" or "Believe" will get played more live because they might fit a setlist better than "My One and Only" or "Down a River."

MK: "Stop Drop Roll" was one of the songs that actually made it into our live repertoire. We wanted to include a couple songs that were part of the already established String Cheese playbook. I think this song came about right after "Uptown Funk" came out, and we were just sitting there in a different rehearsal space one time just going, "What if we wrote a super funny, cheesy kind of dance tune?" And Kyle and Jason just ran with it. We were in the middle of rehearsal and they were just sitting there coming up with these parts, so it might have been loosely inspired from that. It was this fun, playful thing that developed into a real song over a rehearsal, and we just kept working with it. But it was fun to just be able to go into the studio and produce it, and get it into a form that was more produced and sonically wide. That was another one that came off pretty easy because we had, more or less, done all the legwork.

FLYING

MK: One of the things we wanted to do on the album was produce big, lush ballads in the Pink Floyd vein. This one, we started working on during the sessions in Sedona. I remember we had this workshopping session with the lyrics and it was our ode to our favorite big Pink Floyd-style tracks. We used a lot of tremolo guitars and big, spacious reverb.

We were working on that one live the other day, just trying to get it ready to play live. We haven't really done it that much live. But the idea of being able to do a lot of vocal layering and make stuff sound really big without having to play the parts was something we wanted to establish with this song.

It's fun in the studio to be able to come up with vocal parts. Sometimes, live, we're limited by how many people are there singing and able to sing while they're playing. So this was one of those songs where we were like, "We can do whatever we want vocally, just record it and learn how to figure out how to do it live." We're in that process right now. We're hoping to be able to get to that point where we can make it sound just as good live.

At this point, we're OK with the idea of putting out stuff that sounds great on the record and, if we can't reproduce it live, then we'll keep working on it. We don't feel like we're restricted by needing to have everything that we do be available to our live repertoire. So we'll see how it goes.

SO MUCH FUN

KH: "So Much Fun" was written for another project [Kyle Hollingsworth Band]. But I played it for String Cheese and they were like, "Oh, that's cool! Let's do it!" I was like, "We don't have to. It's not very 'String Cheese.'" But they were like, "No, let's definitely do it!"

I had been listening to Ben Folds Five a lot. There's a live album that came out two or three years ago and this was written like a Ben Folds Five tune, with sort of a heavy, punk piano. One night, my daughter walked out of the car, looked up at the moon and she saw the clouds were covering it. She was like, "They're playing hide and seek with the moon!" And I was like, "Hide and seek with the moon? That's a great lyric line!" So I grabbed it. From there, I was thinking, "Let's go super psychedelic. Let's go Beatles." I was thinking the lyrics could be about riding clouds through the afternoon or chasing planets around the room. The whole thing turned into this playful, psychedelic chorus.

Then Jerry put his head deep in this one. He wanted the whole song to be a conversation between a daughter and a father. The pre-chorus is "Every time I fall into your gaze of blue"—because she has really beautiful blue eyes—"reminds me how much fun I can have with you. So much fun riding clouds through the afternoon." And then the next verse comes and the same thing—I say, "It's getting late, time to go to bed." She says, "I don't want to go to bed. I want to stay up all night and wait for the sun." So it's an interesting concept. I've never written a song in a conversational form before.

BEAUTIFUL

MK: "Beautiful" is a track that Chris Berry and I worked on a long time ago. I did a bunch of traveling around Africa with him in 2006 or 2007. Right after that, we came back to the States—he was living in New York—[and] he had this project that he called CB3 that I helped him with. It was just him and the bassist and drummer from Brazilian Girls—two good friends of mine—Jesse Murphy and Aaron Johnston. We co-wrote this track together. Chris and I came up with the original concepts—the bassline and melodies—while [Murphy and Johnston] came up with a lot of the other stuff. It was the mainstay of our short-lived band's career. For like a year, that band just ran around and we played a bunch of shows. It was always one of the funniest songs to play, and I wanted to extend the life of that song because it was too good to not be performed and have it go to the song graveyard.

So we reworked it. I did a whole lyrical rewrite that kind of expanded it from what it was. When Chris wrote it, it was definitely more of a booty-call song, talking to one girl, and I wanted to expand the lyrical scope of it. So I rewrote the lyrics, and it's become a mainstay of the Cheese setlist over the last year and a half.

It was really fun to go to the studio, get it sounding as perfect as we could get it and have it be really big. That's one of the things we brought in that didn't require that much production help—although Jerry did change the bassline in the middle a little bit, which made it sound a little bit more urgent. But, overall, it was fun to just go in and whip it into shape.

JOHN OATES

BY DEAN BUDNICK

JOHN OATES' NEW MEMOIR, *Change of Seasons*, explores a life in music, along with the the singer/guitarist's varied pursuits of racecar driving, skiing and animal husbandry. Throughout the work Oates also reflects on his longtime relationship with Daryl Hall and details the record industry's financial machinations that hid millions of dollars from the duo. The book also includes notable appearances by Hunter S. Thompson, Mick Jagger, Bob Weir, Jerry Garcia and many others.

Early in *Change of Seasons*, you describe playing with Doc and Merle Watson in their dressing room before a show. How did that come about?

I met this fellow named Jerry Ricks, who was a guitar teacher at the same place I was teaching guitar. He also worked at the Second Fret, which was a coffeehouse where all the players played, and I became friends with a guy named Dick Waterman, who had rediscovered a lot of people, like Mississippi John Hurt and Robert Pete Williams. Whenever they came to Philadelphia, Dick Waterman would host these guys at his house or they would stay across the street at my friend Jerry's house because they didn't have the money for hotels. So I would go over to Jerry's, and there would be Doc Watson or Mississippi John Hurt sitting on the couch. I would hang out, talk to them and watch them play. I had this really unique opportunity to be right there in the epicenter of this traditional-music revival.

You performed at MerleFest in 2016. Did that bring things full circle for you?

I'd been wanting to go to MerleFest for so long, and it just never came together with my schedule. Finally, this year, they invited me and, luckily, I jumped on Sam Bush's band bus and we all rode down together. Going to a festival like MerleFest with Sam is like going to a coronation with the king. That paved the way pretty easily, and it was fun. I did my own set in the rain, which was crazy, and I played with The Waybacks, which was really cool. It was just a great experience, and as we drove toward MerleFest and came to town, there was a statue of Doc on the sidewalk, so we stopped.

You lived in Greenwich Village during the 1970s and really seemed to embrace the music scene. Can you describe that era in the city?

It was an incredibly exciting time. The '70s were not the sanitized, non-ethnic version of New York City that the tourists all wander around today. All the neighborhoods were distinctly ethnic and pure, in a way. There also was a lot of crime. It was dangerous to be out on the street, and it was exciting. There was this incredible energy in the music. There was the singer-songwriter thing, there was the rise of the punk movement and the new-wave movement was starting. Living in the Village and being a part of it, I just absorbed it all.

I saw Patti Smith at the Algonquin, when she made one of her first early performances. It was groundbreaking. It was really underground—this poetic, spoken, free-flowing approach, which was totally antithetical to the pop music that I grew up on but, at the same time, I really appreciated it, and I saw what she was trying to do. I saw the New York Dolls and Television during that period of time. Even though I didn't really try to go there musically, it affected me—the way I started writing,

the way I started thinking about music—and it broadened my perspective on what could be done. At the same time, I have a highly attuned pop sense from growing up listening to singles in the '50s and '60s.

The song "Fall in Philadelphia" captures a moment in which you were attacked, yet Philly fans often request it because the tune name-checks their city. I imagine you've encountered similar issues involving interpretation throughout your career.

The beauty of songwriting is that if people care about a song, they absorb it and ascribe their own personal experiences to that song. A perfect example is a song like "Maneater," which is not written about a girl—it was inspired by a woman, but it's actually written about New York City. The thing that chews you up and spits you out is not a woman—it's the city itself, the crazy '80s and the zeitgeist of the '80s in the city. The song "I Can't Go for That (No Can Do)" was written about the music business. It was about being pushed and pulled and being manipulated by the music business. But, of course, you know, one of the things that Daryl and I have always done is realized that if we could tackle a universal topic and somehow personalize it, then it always seems to connect better. It gives people the opportunity to reimagine the song through their own prism but, at the same time, it might not have anything to do with what we were intending.

Hunter S. Thompson was your neighbor for many years in Woody Creek, Colo. You eventually wrote an essay about him, and he had you read it aloud at his house during the *Monday Night Football* commercials. You mention that he poked you in the side with a bowie knife during all of this. Did he break the skin?

No, he was just poking me in the ribs lightly with his knife. He was doing it to get my attention and to make me perk up because I was intimidated. He wanted me to really own it and deliver it because I was mumbling and reading in a quiet way. Basically, I had printed out the story, and I was just going to hand it to him and leave, but he made me read it out loud, which kind of put me on the spot. I was going to read a piece that not only talks about this person, but also I was reading it to a writer who is pretty much a world-famous journalist, who also had a gun and a table full of coke and was drinking whiskey, all at the same time. The sheriff was in the room as well. It was pretty crazy.

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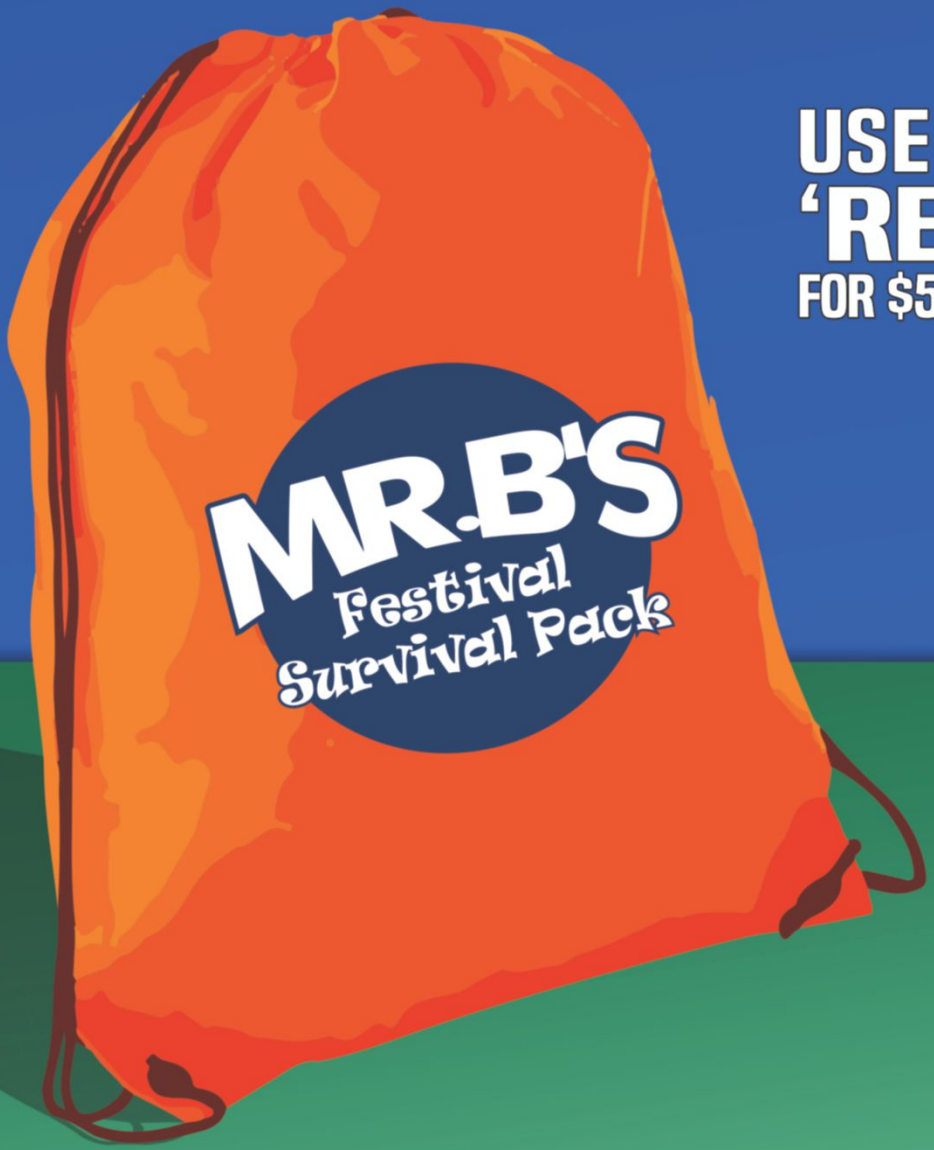

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